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# IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

MARGARET B. MONTAGUE

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IN CALVERT'S VALLEY



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Hester moved a little and laid her head against his knee

(Page 338)

# In Case of War

MARGARET L. BAKER

*Author of "The War Problem"*

NEW YORK  
THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY  
1905

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# In Calvert's Valley

BY  
MARGARET CRESWELL HODGSON

*Author of "The Children of the Valley"*

NEW YORK

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY

1908



# In Calvert's Valley

BY

MARGARET PRESCOTT MONTAGUE

*Author of "The Sowing of Alderson Cree"*



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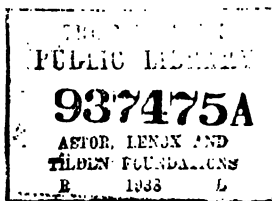
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*The Plimpton Press Norwood Mass. U.S.A.*

**To**

**MY BROTHER AND SISTER**

**CARY AND MARGRETTA MONTAGUE**

**THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED**

**OPTUN 31 DEC '37**





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# IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

## CHAPTER I

### HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

THE train had left Alexandria behind now and was swinging easily along through the lowlands of Virginia. By and by it would strike westward to meet the long ascent of the Blue Ridge, which almost tears the heart out of the engines — as many hearts have been torn out in the immemorial struggle of man against nature — and which breaks their magnificent free velocity to a slow and laboured progress. But that was a thing of the future; and for the present the black line of train with its blazing eyes rushed smoothly through the night in long pulses of speed which made the track sing beneath it, swung the cars from side to side, and caused the woodwork to whisper and complain together, as though each little section rubbed a squeaking shoulder against its brother.

Hester Rymal put her head back against the plump upholstery of the seat and turned her face to the full rush of the darkness without; with the movement, she shut herself away from the present life of her fellow-passengers and entered into her own intimate existence. The fretting children across the aisle, who were being coaxed to bed; the chattering couple of middle-aged

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

ladies at her back; the whisk of the porter's stiffly starched jacket, as he bustled up and down the car, pulling open berths with their rattling chains and slamming them up again, in an apparently aimless manner, were all things from which she was infinitely retired, for with the turning of her face to the window she withdrew, as it were, into the little secluded world of her own thoughts, and pulled the doors shut behind her.

Outside the world was a dim and mysterious place, in which uncertain shapes slid past, and where an occasional light winked at her and was gone.

The pulse of the train's speed, the singing of the rails, and the velvet darkness slipping by, all brought to Hester a sense of movement, of aliveness and power. She felt as though the great undercurrents of the world — the power and force of life, and the splendour of reality — had taken hold upon her and were sweeping her along on a great wave of existence, and all her being leaped to meet it with a glad eagerness for the pull of life, the glory of achievement, and her part to play in the magnificent old world game.

For Hester Rymal was a young woman and she was going home.

When Hester's mother, Mrs. Rymal, had died fourteen years ago, her only sister, Mrs. St. George — the very beautiful Mrs. St. George of Baltimore, or of Balt'mer as she would herself have said — had come down to Willoughby — the little county town in West Virginia where Hester lived — in a flood of tears, and in deep and exquisite mourning. It was character-

## HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

istic of Ellie St. George that her grief, though it was really very sincere, should be beautiful, and should have for itself an appropriate and lovely setting. All her life she had desired the beautiful, and what is really desired with the very foundations of one's nature is apt to come to pass. Therefore Ellie St. George was a beautiful woman, and beautiful things — things not necessarily nature's — were apt to surround her and to sit at her feet; and it was something of a comfort to her really genuine grief that her sister Hester, who had been as a girl almost as beautiful as herself, should have been in her white serenity of death very lovely indeed. It was, moreover, this love for the beautiful that had made her eager to adopt little Hester, who, in spite of her straight black hair sweeping back from her small tragic face, white from its first grip of life, gave decided promise in her delicately regular features and her big grey eyes of a loveliness of her own quite as unusual as that of her mother, or even indeed of her aunt. Judge Rymal, however, did not desire beauty with the foundations of his being, nor had he ever been one of the things which had sat at his sister-in-law's feet. What he desired was honesty and the realities of life, and at the death of his wife, his affections centred entirely upon his little eight-year-old daughter, who in her turn was too young to have any very strong desires of her own save only that her lovely mother could be restored to her, that she should never be separated from her father, and that James Calvert would let her ride his newly broken

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

colt. Therefore Mrs. St. George was forced to return to Baltimore with merely the promise that Hester should come to her for a long visit when she was twenty-one; and Hester, having arrived at that age, had accomplished her visit, and now, after eighteen months' absence, her train was stretching itself swiftly along the iron pathway which leads first South, through the flat lands, and then West and West, over one range of mountains and across that wonderful Valley of Virginia, and then up more mountains, to leave her at last at a little place known as Willoughby — at least it is so known to the very limited number of people who are aware at all of its existence — and which is a small county town lying at the head of Calvert's Valley — Hester Rymal's own smiling home valley of West Virginia.

When a girl reaches the age of twenty-two she begins to understand herself a little, and to know what to expect of her own nature. Nobody ever understands one's self entirely in this world — which is perhaps one of the reasons for its being such an unusually delightful place. Up to that time the world is an unfamiliar and surprising place, and nothing in it is more surprising than her own self. At twenty-two or so, however, she gets into her stride, as it were, and herself and her nature strike hands at last in more or less harmonious fellowship, and go forth together along the paths of life, ready for whatever existence may offer. Hester Rymal was twenty-two years old now, and it had come to her undeniably that with

## HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

her father's own nature she desired the realities of life.

The months spent with her aunt had been exciting and delightful — a fairy story come true to a simply brought up girl like Hester. The first summer she had spent abroad, always attended by the pageantry of riches, the evidences of which were made beautiful by Mrs. St. George's artistic touch. The winter following her aunt had introduced her to society in Baltimore, and those months as looked back upon appeared like a long shimmering necklace of party days and nights, strung together by a thread of new acquaintanceship. The next summer, which was the summer that the present autumn had just gathered into its arms, Hester and her aunt had spent at different Northern resorts. And at first Hester had entered into it all with a delighted zest, but later on, perhaps she grew a little tired, at any rate she began to suspect that she and the people with whom she was thrown were, for the most part, spectators merely at the game of life — that the men one met at a german, for instance, were not always doing the most interesting things in the world: and as soon as this came home to Hester, she knew that what she desired was home and reality.

"Your aunt tells me," said a very handsome gentleman — handsome with the white hair of middle age — one of Mrs. St. George's devoted admirers, "that she wishes to take you abroad again this winter, but that you are bent on returning to Virginia."

"West Virginia," murmured Hester.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

and was seated at her window looking forth eagerly to catch the first glimpse of familiar landmarks. They had passed Covington now where the few strayed fashionables making for the autumn season at the Hot Springs had alighted, and with their departure Hester felt that at last they had struck into the home stretch. Full bright daylight had taken proud possession of the world, in all the pride and beauty of an October morning. Hester had opened the window wide beside her, and the fresh air blew in with a delicious life in it. The train was pushing its way heavily along almost at the top of the Alleghanies now. The mountains in their gorgeous mantle of autumn colour rose with a serene splendour on either side of the track, their glory half hidden by delicate mists which went stepping softly up the pathway of the crimson and gold hills to vanish in the waiting blue of the sky.

"Nature lifts her curtain for the first act, which is, 'Hester Rymal comes home.' " Hester said in her heart arrogantly, as though the curtain of that particular morning swept up for her, and for her alone.

Rail fences ran their zig-zag way across the narrow stretches of farm lands, and occasionally little log cabins flashed past, their slab roofs covered every now and again with brown and yellow patches — apples spread there to dry. Hester knew the taste of dried apples in the autumn very well indeed. It was a remembered flavour which spoke of out-of-doors and eager childhood, and was matched only by that other bygone delight — the first sip of maple sap in the spring.



## HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

James Calvert had been wont to notch the maple trees for Hester Rymal to drink from.

Around her in the car the passengers were awaking to life and getting dressed. The intonation of the voices and the scraps of conversation that reached her had all a pleasantly familiar ring in Hester's ears. Two women in the section at her back were talking.

"Well, I'm married to a man," the first one volunteered, "that ne-ver says a harmful thing about any living soul."

"Well, anybody could tell that just by looking at *him*," her friend returned cordially.

"Yes, poor soul," the first voice went on drawlingly, "it makes me feel s'bad sometimes, I just fly out at him so, but he ne-ver says a word back; and now just look at me leaving him nearly worked to *death* and going off to Jamestown. But he just wouldn't hear to my not going — and oh my, it certainly was grand! And afterwards I stopped over in Richmond. My sister's married and living there, you know — got a mighty nice home, and three dear sweet little children. And they were having a big meeting of the Episcopal Church there then — city was just full of preachers."

"Did you get to see the Bishop of London?" the friend inquired eagerly.

"Yes indeedy, I saw him several times. He's a nice man, I reckon — everybody spoke s'well of him — but it always looked s'odd to me to see him and all the English bishops dressed in knee-pants."

Hester turned her dancing eyes back again to the

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

landscape. A brown field dotted with pumpkins and stacks of cut fodder shot by, with groups of men sitting in circles around the piles of yellow and white corn. With its passing Hester's mind gave a quick bound of remembrance. Home! Home! It was all part and parcel of her childhood, the foundations and very backbone of her being.

When she was a little tangled mite of a girl one of the farm hands had made for her a small shucking peg. Perhaps she had never done a large amount of work with it, but she had loved it very dearly; and at the remembrance of the little peg, Hester shut her eyes impulsively and all the bright picture of the corn field, set in autumn colouring, danced before her mental vision. She wore in those days, she remembered, a little dark blue woollen hood which usually hung recklessly at the back of her neck, entangling her hair and catching all the little Spanish-needles and burrs that in the autumn embrace so eagerly any woolly opportunity which offers to carry them forth from their home surroundings and out into the open world to seek their fortunes.

Of herself the little blue hood was all that Hester could recall, but all the picture of the mellow brown field, the stacks of corn, the grey sky — one does not shuck on clear days — the fences flaring with a tangle of colour, the blue-jays calling to one another in strident notes or flashing here and there gay streaks of azure, came back to her in vivid remembrance. And with the picture came the sound of it all. The crackle of

## HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

the fodder as the ears were torn from their mother-stalk, the shriek of the shuck as it was wrenched free, the sharp snap when it broke off, and then the tiny crash as, describing a golden arch against the sky, the shucked ear fell at last upon the corn pile — piles which grew and grew as the day wore on, and which were always the golden consummation of all the brown field's hopes.

So Hester's eyes took in the dear familiar landscape as her mind wandered back into the past and dwelt there in fascinated reminiscence, because with all her recollection of her own childhood came that of James Calvert as well, for always his little boy figure went hand in hand with her own little girl self through all her dreams of dead and gone delights.

"Yaas, Boss — jes' in er minit, Sah — you tak er seat in dis section, an' yous'll be ready d'rectly."

Hester looked up. The darky porter was indicating her section to a young man who had evidently just returned from the dressing-room to find his own number still unmade.

"Jes' set down, Boss — set right down — de lady don't keer," the porter still urged, as the young man showed a polite tendency to hesitate.

"Shall I disturb you if I sit here for a minute?" he asked, his voice of a becoming gravity and deference.

Hester's eyes were still vague with her dreams of other days, yet she answered simply, "Not at all," and turned back again to the window.

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The young man sat down opposite her, and looked out at the scenery also, yet he could not help an occasional furtive glance at Hester, whose grey eyes, black lashes, and black hair, gave her, together with her delicate pink cheeks, a very unusual beauty of her own. As for the young man himself, he was blond and of medium height, and his expression was pleasant and untroubled.

Suddenly the train shot out upon a high embankment from the sheer sides of which one looked far down into the gracious splendour of a little valley, the mountains bending sweetly above it and the whole scene wrapt in the glorious misty effulgence of early morning light.

Hester gave a little unconscious gasp of delighted recognition and the young man too looked eagerly forth.

"Goodness!" he exclaimed involuntarily, "How magnificent! I wonder where we are."

The temptation was too much for Hester. In the mellow light of home-coming the world seemed a genial and friendly place, in which if one possessed a piece of information one might, as a matter of course, share it with whomsoever desired it.

"That," she said, "is Jerry's Run. It's one of the biggest fills on the road."

"Ah," said the young man. "I ought to have remembered," he added, "I've been over this road so many times."

He looked at Hester as though hoping she would

## HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

say more, but the train had slid into a small country station, and she was absorbed in what the window had to offer.

From the car one could see across a little dimpling hillside, dotted with pine trees, to the white sweep of a high-road. Along the road a man in a buggy was driving furiously.

The puffing engine blew off a little steam leisurely, and in the distance the man lashed his horse. The mail bags had been flung on, the engineer was looking back along the train to the conductor. The buggy came to a stand a short distance from the station; a man and woman were in it. The engine bell began to ring. The man flung himself out of the buggy and sprinted up to the station. The conductor was turning toward his train.

"For Heaven's sake," gasped the man, "hold that train till m'wife kin git here. She's goin' down the line to do some shoppin'."

The woman, who was fat, was panting up to the station.

The conductor was large, and imbued with a sense of his own importance.

"You all know the hours for the trains to leave," he began with official pompousness. "You tarried too long over the buttermilk and the soda biscuit," he concluded, somewhat in anticlimax. Nevertheless he held the train the desired minute, and the woman flashed him a smile, as she scrambled up the steps of the day coach.

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Hester's eyes met those of the young man opposite, and involuntarily both faces broke into smiles.

"The buttermilk and the soda biscuit," Hester murmured delightedly.

They had started on again, and presently a little green station twinkled by. "Backbone," read the young man, as the white letters flashed past. "I always thought that was a curious name," he added.

"It's named that," said Hester, again unable to resist the temptation, "because when they got as far as this in laying the road the engineer said the backbone of the Alleghanies was broken."

"Poor old Alleghanies!" laughed the young man, more amused possibly by Hester's simplicity, and her knowledge of the road's history, than by the information she gave.

"You seem to be very familiar with this part of the line," he ventured.

Hester's cheeks were beginning to glow, and her eyes were dark with the excitement of getting home.

"It's my home — I live just a few stations beyond here. And — and," she added impulsively — the young man's face was one to inspire confidence — "I've been away from it all nearly eighteen months."

"Well, it's a lovely part of the world, and I don't wonder you are glad to get back to it," he returned sympathetically.

## HESTER RYMAL COMES HOME

Again the train had pulled up at a little green station backed almost against the mountains.

"Alleghany," Hester cried. "We'll be over the line into West Virginia directly."

"Alleghany? Why, so it is," said the young man, looking forth. "You get off here to go to the Old Sweet Springs, don't you?" he went on eagerly, Hester's enthusiasm evidently inspiring him to contribute his share of local colour. "I stayed there one summer. You get off here and then you drive over to the Old Sweet. It's a pretty drive, I remember, with lots of rhododendron all along the way, and a creek that keeps wandering across the road."

"Yes," said Hester, "it's Dunlap's creek."

The young man laughed, "Oh," he said, "I see I can't tell you anything about the surrounding country, can I? Ah, here's White Sulphur," he went on, presently, "I've had some nice times here, but it looks rather shut up and forlorn at this season of the year, doesn't it?"

He might have added also, had he so desired, that his mother had been the belle of the White Sulphur season of seventy-two — that witty and lovely little person, Olivia Page, who had turned so many hearts that summer, and who had been called the Dark Beauty of the Eastern Shore. But if he did not speak of her, perhaps as he looked across at the little half glimpse of the Spring's grounds that one gets from the train, Page Emlyn thought of his mother's dainty personality in her filmy muslins strolling beneath the grand old

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

trees playing delicately at the game of love, in all the soft effulgence of summer light and shadow — the game of love which she afterward learned to play in such passionate earnest.

"And now," cried Hester, with a breathless excitement, "we shall pick up the river directly!"

And presently, indeed, from the high embankment of the railroad they looked down through the enshrouding trees to catch the flash and twinkle of a silver thread of water keeping dancing pace with the track.

"*Oh!*" gasped Hester suddenly with a little surprised catch of her breath. The train for a moment slid along a bit of open track from which one could again catch a glimpse of a country road. Along this road, mounted on a large chestnut horse, a young man was riding. The horse frightened by the train was tearing at his bit and trying to run, but the young man sat him calmly and easily, his face lifted eagerly to scan the flying cars. Hester leaned quickly out of the window as they passed, a little frill of handkerchief fluttering from her fingers.

At the sight of her the rider snatched off his hat and waved it joyously about his head in reply, careless that his horse plunged furiously as he did so. They made a very fine picture down there upon the road, the splendid horse and the powerful young man, all flashed upon by the sharp dancing light of the morning.

When Hester drew her head in again her cheeks were flaming, and her heart was pounding with excitement. It was somewhat overwhelming after all the



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months of separation to come unexpectedly like that upon the heart of all her dreams.

"Why!" exclaimed Emlyn as he followed the rider with his eyes, — for sitting backward as he did he had a longer view of him than Hester, — "Why, that looks like James Calvert!"

Hester glanced at him in surprise. "It is James Calvert," she said, "do you know him?"

"Why, yes — not very well, we've been in one or two land deals together. He seems to be a very fine fellow," he added, and as he said it he glanced quickly at Hester, and again he saw the colour sweep up to her forehead.

"Come," he went on impulsively, "mayn't I introduce myself — I'm sure Calvert would do it for me, if he were here. I am Page Emlyn."

Hester smiled as she rose for the porter's assiduous brushing. There was something very charming about Page Emlyn, and few people found it possible to resist him.

"I am Judge Rymal's daughter of Willoughby — that sounds like the 'Bailiff's daughter of Islington,' " she added with a little laugh for her own trick of words. "And oh!" she went on joyously, "I shall be home now in just a minute!"

She stood before him slender and tall and full of vitality, her grey eyes shining and her cheeks delicately flushed.

"We's jes' slowin' up for Willoughby now, Miss," the porter volunteered.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Emlyn rose quickly and held out his hand. "May I wish you the very happiest of home-comings?" he said.

For a fleeting instant Hester's fingers touched his. "Please do — thank you," she said, and was gone.

"Willoughby! Willoughby!" the conductor cried, and looking from the window Emlyn saw Hester Rymal caught in the huge embrace of a white-haired old gentleman.

The bell clanged, the car gave a jerk, and in a moment the train had pulled away from it all and was slipping smoothly along once more.

Hester Rymal had come home.

For a little time Emlyn still stared out at the flying mountains and the little shining fields, which were all just as pretty as ever no doubt, but which seemed somehow hardly as full of interest as they had been. Then he said sharply to himself "*James Calvert* — Good Heavens!"

But afterwards he rose and went cheerfully enough in search of breakfast which a white-coated waiter was informing the world in general was to be had in the dining-car in the rear.

## CHAPTER II

### ENTER THE PRINCE

"AND oh!" cried Hester, "Oh, how *good* it is to be home again!"

It was still the day of her return, only now it had drifted on to the afternoon. In Calvert's Valley the days are more apt to drift than to flash quickly by. Which does not mean that they are dull, but that, unlike existence in so many parts of the world nowadays, one finds there plenty of time for most occupations. There one has leisure to taste life to the full, turning it, as it were, upon the tongue to get its last and deepest flavour. There, too, is none of the grab and gobble, the lunch-counter snatches of life, that city existence affords; and so the unhurried days go softly and cosily by, like the shadow of a summer cloud upon the mountains.

The sun was beginning to make the blue descent of the western sky now. No little breeze stirred anywhere, nor was there the shred of a cloud in all the enormous azure dome overhead, nor even the far-away pipe of a bird to break the bright stillness of it all.

Hester sat upon the top step of the porch at her own home, and in rocking-chairs at her back sat her father,

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

and her cousin Lizzie Blair. The latter had come to Willoughby at the death of Mrs. Rymal to keep house for Hester and the Judge.

Bob, Hester's black and tan collie, stood beside her on the porch. She had flung her arm about his neck, and every now and again as she talked she caught his head down against her breast in a little spasmodic hug of affection. And every time she did so, the collie wagged his tail with delight and tried to lick her face, which gave evidence of a very nice disposition on his part, for certainly Hester's little spasms of affection placed him in anything but a comfortable position.

The Rymals' house, a red brick affair with white pillars, sat upon the gentle slope of a little hill. At its back, and on either side, lay the open fields of Judge Rymal's farm. In front one had a fine view across the valley — which here is almost a mile and a half wide — straight away to the Shadow Mountains opposite, while nearer at hand the yard ran down to a neat white fence shutting it away from the high-road.

Across the fence and the road were more fields again, only these belonged to the Bedingers — though when Hester was a child they had belonged to old Colonel Eustace Calvert, James Calvert's grandfather; and in a clump of maple trees, half hidden now by their bright foliage, one had a glimpse from the Rymals' porch of a large white frame house, whose side wings rambled aimlessly away in room after room, until they were finished off at last by low square towers. It was the old Calvert house — mansion, the valley called it —

## ENTER THE PRINCE

and had been built years and years ago by the first Calvert who ever came into the valley.

Away across the fields of the valley one caught the flash and twinkle of the river under the brow of the Shadow Mountains, the Droop River, which, breaking its way out from among the Droop Mountains to the north, sweeps across the valley to fling itself against the Shadow Mountains, where it is turned abruptly to the South in many an angry little ripple and water-fall.

On the right hand, a quarter of a mile or so away, huddled against the mountains, was the white cluster of houses which made up the small town of Willoughby, a town which boasts perhaps a matter of twelve to fifteen hundred inhabitants.

Hester sat for a little while in silence, looking at the dimpling sunlit valley, and the miraculous autumn colour of the mountains, tawny yellow, and deep bright red, overlaid by the long purple fingers of shadow where the little hollows crept up the mountain sides, and over all, the perfect blue serenity of the sky.

Then she caught Bob's head down against her breast — "Oh!" she cried, "I had forgotten how beautiful it all is!"

Mrs. Blair rocked back and forth with a little increased energy, stirred thereto by sympathy in Hester's outburst.

"Well," she said, "I always did say there's no place like home."

Judge Rymal said nothing. He had a keen affection

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

for his daughter, and to have her at home again, and glad to be there, seemed to him at that moment the best thing that the world had to offer, but he did not find any phrase—not even a platitude—that appeared quite adequate to the occasion. He smiled down upon her, however, with a large geniality which seemed almost as all-embracing as the out-of-doors itself. Indeed there was something about Judge Rymal that made one place him instinctively against the background of an open landscape. His whole make-up was one that spoke of honesty, and a large naturalness; of a man who all his days had courted the realities of life, and had met existence with a frank readiness for whatever it had to offer. He was a big man, big without being fat. It was a grievance of his cousin Lizzie Blair's, that try as she would—and she did try very faithfully—she could never succeed in making him fat. He was tall too, his shoulders were broad, and in his youth he had been very strong. His cheeks were rosy and tanned, and his white hair was apt to stand up in a crest. Altogether he looked like a buoyant wind-swept old gentleman, who was still sufficiently strong to rejoice in running the race of life.

He had retired from active practice, and was chiefly concerned now with the management of his farm, but he was still an authority on the law, and was appealed to constantly throughout the State.

“And how did you think James Calvert was looking?” Cousin Lizzie inquired abruptly. There was very little finesse about Cousin Lizzie.

## ENTER THE PRINCE

The colour crept up into Hester's face as it had done twice before that day on James Calvert's account, and the Judge shifted a trifle uneasily in his chair.

"I haven't seen James yet," said Hester. "At least," she added, "I only caught a glimpse of him from the train."

"Well, for the goodness' sake!" cried Cousin Lizzie, "do you mean to say he wasn't at the station to meet you?"

Hester shook her head. "No," she said calmly.

"Goodness!" cried Cousin Lizzie again. "Well, what on earth's the matter with the boy? Why, he's been counting the days until you'd be home for a month past. He ate supper here only last week, and when he came out from the table, he looked around the sitting-room and then he broke out in a laugh. 'Never mind,' he said, 'Hester'll be home in a week!' Why, he surely didn't know you were coming to-day."

Hester looked away at the mountains. She was as sure of James Calvert's love for her as she was of the very foundations of the earth itself. This being so, her Cousin Lizzie's perturbation over his non-appearance amused her, and some little perverse devil made her play to it.

She let her mouth droop ever so slightly, and her eyes, which were very large and in their fringe of dark lashes capable of expressing every emotion under the sun of heaven — and some which are not under it — grew sombre.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"I wrote him which day I was coming home," she said in a small voice.

"Well, for the good —" Cousin Lizzie began in astonishment, but the Judge uncrossed his legs with a jerk and cut her short.

"James had to go over into Greenbrier — he's looking up witnesses for that Fletcher case. He told me to tell you that it was absolutely necessary for him to go. He expects to get back to-night," he said in slow, short sentences.

"Oh," said Hester. A little smile just glanced across her face and was gone; she had hardly hoped to stir her father to James Calvert's defence.

"Well, why in the world, Judge, did you wait all this time before telling Hester?" Cousin Lizzie demanded. With all the world she loved a lover, and to make an appeal to her sympathy one had only to be in love, or have a good appetite.

"I didn't tell Hester," said the Judge in his slow way, "because —"

"Well because *what*?" Cousin Lizzie questioned in staccato tones. She was an energetic little woman who accomplished a great deal in quick sharp movements, and the Judge's large slowness sometimes tried her.

"Because I forgot it," the Judge concluded calmly. Judge Rymal was a clever man in his way, and did a good many things well, but he had never been able to evade the truth very successfully.

At his words Hester shot a quick look at him, and



## ENTER THE PRINCE

wondered suddenly why her father should have kept back James Calvert's message.

She said nothing, however, and Cousin Lizzie, whose nature was devoid of suspicion, took up the conversation once more.

"James's doing mighty well these days," she said. "Every one speaks so well of him. They say he'll be a rich man before he dies, what with his law and these land deals, and all. And he certainly *is* good to his mother and Dolly — and he's sent Eugene to the Johns Hopkins — he's studying to be a doctor there. They say he's got a great turn for medicine. Poor Mrs. Calvert — I was at her house day before yesterday — I took her some fruit cake — some made by your great-aunt Cynthia's receipt, you know, Hester."

"I should think I did, Cousin Lizzie," Hester returned. "I hope you didn't take it all to Mrs. Calvert."

Cousin Lizzie smiled. Any compliment to her cookery always went straight to her heart.

"No — No, there's plenty left for you," she returned. "But as I was saying, poor Mrs. Calvert, I don't believe I ever saw her looking so well; why, she looks ten years younger. 'O Mrs. Blair,' she said to me, 'nobody *knows* what James has been to me!' James is a good boy, I know, but I just thought to myself when she said it, well, I thought, I reckon *you'd* think any man who came home sober was a wonder. But Mrs. Calvert always was a proud woman, and if the Calvert men drank —"

"And they certainly did," the Judge cut in. Hester

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

raised her hand in a little protest, but she let it fall again without remark.

"Well, if they did," Cousin Lizzie went on, "nobody heard tell of it from Mrs. Calvert."

"Ann Calvert is a very fine woman," said the Judge, briefly.

It was the first time through the day that Hester, the Judge, and Cousin Lizzie had really had a moment to themselves. People had been popping in and out of the house constantly to see Hester and to welcome her home, and it had taken her an hour and a half to get from the station to the house, though they were scarcely half a mile apart. But Hester was a beauty and a favourite, and every one was anxious to see how she looked and to welcome her home. She had talked so much in disjointed exclamation, question and answer, that her throat fairly ached and she was glad enough to sit on the porch now and let Cousin Lizzie do the talking.

Dinner being over, Cousin Lizzie was at leisure to greet her friends and inquire how the world went with them. Dinner was the climax of her existence, the fruition of her morning's toil, the jewel of every day. Supper stirred her again to a mild anticlimax, but dinner was the great event. One's past is generally marked by a succession of happenings, or accomplishments, which stand as mile-posts to indicate the flight of time. Cousin Lizzie's past as seen in review would have shown a long procession of delicious dinners, marching each a day apart, back into the dim obscurity where memory

## ENTER THE PRINCE

stops. And the valley always paid tribute to her culinary abilities in the words "Mis' Blair certainly *does* set a pretty table."

Cousin Lizzie was a widow. What had been the cause of Cousin Charley Blair's death, Hester never remembered having been told, but knowing her Cousin Lizzie's propensities she had always strongly suspected that he had died from over-eating. For feed the brutes — feed them well and deliciously — was certainly her motto in practice, though it is to be doubted if she had ever really heard the expression.

It was her firm belief that woman had been put into the world to look after man, to feed him, make him comfortable, and as far as possible to keep him from doing himself a mischief. What man was here for she was wise enough not to attempt to discover; she had faith to believe, however, that there was a reason for his creation, obscure as it might appear to be. But that, at their best, men were poor things in the matter of taking care of themselves she was more than convinced. And she put her conviction into such good practice that it was a strong-minded man indeed who did not find himself, once he was delivered into her hands, settling very shortly into a corpulent inertia. Judge Rymal, who was strong-minded, was sometimes a trifle restive under the very excellent care which he received. "Cousin Lizzie is so particular about wet feet," he once told a friend in confidence, "that I sometimes wonder she doesn't have all the horses change their shoes whenever they come in on a rainy

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

day. It is fortunate, however," he added after a pause of reflection, "that she doesn't carry it as far as that."

Cousin Lizzie rocked softly back and forth in her chair now.

"You're looking mighty well, Hester," she said. And in her heart of hearts she was a little hurt that Hester should look so well when she had been away from her care for a year and a half. But being a woman, Cousin Lizzie knew she could be trusted with her own welfare.

"How do you think your father's looking?" she went on jealously.

"Oh, splendidly," Hester answered. "You do take good care of him, Cousin Lizzie," she added affectionately.

Cousin Lizzie looked the Judge over with much the detached and considering air that one bestows upon the condition of some prize animal. Even in his own family the Judge did not relish being the centre of attention, and he fidgeted now somewhat uncomfortably under Hester's and Cousin Lizzie's scrutiny.

"But I can't get him *fat*, Hester," Cousin Lizzie complained. "I do everything in the world I can think of, and yet he just stays the same. He just *won't* get fat, and I know people must think it's because he doesn't get the right things to eat." There was tragedy in her tone.

"But — but *hang* it all, Lizzie, I don't *want* to get fat!" the Judge burst out, and Hester laughed.

"Well, you may laugh, Hester," Cousin Lizzie re-

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monstrated, paying no attention to the Judge's protest, for she was well aware that men very rarely know what they really want, and even when they do, what they want is generally bad for them.

"You may laugh," she repeated, "but all the same I just *can't* get him fat."

"You sound like the bugle," said Hester. "I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up in the morning!"

"Oh, there's no trouble about getting him *up*, he's always out of his room by half-past six every morning," Cousin Lizzie returned. She could always be trusted to seize the obvious in a remark and let all the rest go.

Now it may be supposed by the reader, from Mrs. Blair's anxiety on the Judge's behalf, that she had matrimonial designs upon him. Lest this should be the case, I hasten to say that she had already had three offers of marriage since Mr. Blair's death, one before she came to Willoughby, and two after she took up her abode at Judge Rymal's.

Who the two men in the valley were who had offered her their hands and hearts I never knew, but I always suspected Joe Congrieve, the postmaster, of being one, because he was constantly saying in a wistful sort of way that Mis' Blair made the best beat biscuit that he ever put in his mouth. To which Esquire Fairly was apt to return, "Oh, I dunno's Mis' Blair's cooking's anything so extra special;" which makes me almost sure that he must have been the other suitor — different natures take their misfortunes so differently.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

No, Cousin Lizzie did not desire to marry the Judge. All she desired was to do her duty by him; except that she would have liked also to have him fatten up a little, proclaiming thereby to the world at large that he was having her duty done by him.

Suddenly from the back of the house there began a steady thump, thump, and pounding.

"Oh, good!" cried Hester. "Aunt Jenny's making beaten biscuit for supper."

Cousin Lizzie jumped up briskly.

"Yes," she cried, "and I've got to see she fixes 'em to suit me. If I don't stand *right* over her, she'll forget every time to pinch the centre out."

Her words came back faintly as her plump little figure disappeared into the wide hall.

There was silence for a moment between Hester and her father when they were left alone. Then Hester took her arm from around Bob, and gave him a little push to one side.

"Father," she said, giving him a very direct look, "why didn't you want to give me James Calvert's message?" Hester always went straight to her point.

The Judge lit his pipe with a slightly exaggerated air of leisure.

"Why, Hester," he said, "what an idea!"

Hester looked at him full and straight. Her eyes at times were embarrassingly sincere.

"O father," she said, "it's not an idea, you know."

The Judge moved uneasily in his chair.

"Well," he began, and stopped.

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"Well," Hester returned rather relentlessly.

"Hester," he broke out at length, "you know I never did like James Calvert much."

"I know you don't, father," Hester returned. And she looked away at the pretty landscape for a moment in silence.

"You never did like him," she said at length accusingly. "When he was just a little boy you disliked him. You were never fair to him." (Her cheeks were beginning to grow very bright) "I—I always supposed you disliked him because he was the old Colonel's grandson."

"No, Hester," the Judge cut in drily, "I did James the honour to dislike him on his own account, and I still do."

"But why, father, why?" she cried a trifle breathlessly — she was apt to lose her breath a little when she got excited. "Hasn't he done splendidly? Hasn't he worked hard, and kept straight and sober in spite of his inheritance, and hasn't he been perfectly *splendid* to his family?"

"Yes, that's all quite true," said the Judge. "And yet —"

"And yet you don't like him," Hester cut in.

"No, Hester," her father returned, "I don't like him."

Hester rose to her feet and stood before him. Her eyes were very bright and dark, and her voice shook a little.

"But why — *why* don't you like him?" she per-

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

sisted. "All the valley and Willoughby is proud of James Calvert, and what he's done — then why don't *you* like him?"

"Hester," said the Judge, "I don't know why I don't like him. I'd probably like him better if I did. If I could just lay my finger on the thing and say that's what I don't like about James — if I could just do that, why then I think I'd get quite fond of the rest of him. But you see that's just what I *can't* do. He seems to be a splendid young fellow, and he certainly has done well, and yet I don't like him."

"Father," said Hester, quietly, "I am going to marry James Calvert."

The Judge put out his hand quickly and took hold upon one of hers.

"O my child," he said, "don't do it."

"I am engaged to him — I accepted him the night before I went away."

"Hester, break it off before it's too late," the Judge begged. "I tell you the truth, dear, he's not the man to make you happy."

"Father," said Hester, her hand still in his and looking down at him with her beautiful grey eyes, "I love you very much, but I am engaged to James Calvert, and I love him, and — and if the whole *world* was against the man I love, I — I would stick to him," she wound up, a little quiver of emotion in her voice.

"Hester," said the Judge again, "don't marry James Calvert."



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She looked at him unflinchingly. "I shall marry the man I love, father," she said.

The Judge regarded her a little while in silence, then he got up, still holding her hand.

"Hester," he said, "you're the stubbornest little piece anywhere from one end of the valley to the other, and if you make up your mind to do a thing, I suppose you'll do it. But all I have to say is, that the whole world, much less James Calvert, can't come between you and me."

And with the words he put out his arm and drew her towards him affectionately.

The tears sprang into Hester's eyes, and with a little passionate gesture she flung both arms tight about his neck.

"I shall certainly marry James Calvert," she said, "but I shall always — *always* love you just the same!"

Hester and her father were rather unusual in their attitude toward each other. Each recognized the impossibility of changing the other's mind once it was made up. And recognizing this fact they shook hands over their disagreements and went their several ways, unshaken in their individual opinion, but still as good friends as ever.

The Judge had perhaps first become aware of the existence in the family of another spirit of his own make when Hester was a matter of four years old. She had defied his authority on some small point, and the Judge, thinking that what the naval authorities might call a demonstration would have an intimidat-

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ing and desirable effect upon her, had seized the poker and shaken it in the irate little person's face.

"Hester Rymal," he cried threateningly, "do you see this poker?"

To which Hester had immediately replied by snatching up the tongs and exactly copying his tone and gesture.

"Yes, father," she returned, "and do *you* see these tongs?"

And Hester was herself not much older when she discovered that her spirit only matched her father's. And thereafter peace, though not victory for either side, reigned in the Rymal household.

"Lord!" cried the Judge, suddenly, looking over his daughter's shoulder, "here comes Tessie. I'll leave the field to you," and so saying, and planting a hasty kiss on her forehead, he disappeared into the house.

Hester turned with some relief to the sprightly little figure of her neighbour, Tessie Bedinger, who appeared at the yard gate, having skipped across the road from her own house opposite. And as she waved her hand in welcome, she experienced a keener feeling of cordiality than that volatile little person usually inspired within her. Any interruption was welcome at that moment, for her interview with her father had stirred her a good deal, and Hester was not the kind of woman who liked, as she herself would have expressed it, to take the lid off of her emotions. She had a controlled, but a very passionate nature, and once her feelings

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were thoroughly aroused the clutch of them was almost terrifying.

As Tessie arrived at the porch steps she paused for one dramatic moment, her pale blue eyes regarding Hester from under a pompadour of extraordinary size and fluffiness. Then with a little scream she darted up the steps and flung herself upon the other.

"O Hessie honey, precious, darling! Ain't it just *grand* to have you back again!" She stood off a moment from Hester. "Let me look at you — well, *ain't* you just the grandest thing! I'm just crazy about you! Um — um! That a Paris dress? Oh, I do think it must be just the grandest thing on *earth* to buy things in Paris! Now just tell me all about your trip — I'm just dead to hear all about everything. The travelled lady! I reckon you won't hardly speak to ordinary folks — I'm just scared to death of you! But um — um, looks mighty good to me to see you back!"

She flung herself breathlessly into a chair, and rocked spasmodically. "Now just tell me all about everything!" she commanded.

Hester drew rather an agitated breath. She always felt somewhat like a reed shaken by the wind in the presence of Tessie's vivacity. It was not, however, necessary for her to say much, for though Tessie honestly believed she had come over to hear all about Hester's trip, she never paused long enough in her own conversation for Hester to insert even a word.

"Oh, don't ask me anything about Willoughby," she rattled on — Hester had not the slightest inten-

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

tion of doing so. "It's just dead — just plain dead. Eugene Calvert's gone back to Balt'mer, and James has been just as cross as two sticks for all the time you've been away — just like two *sticks*. But *my*, there certainly was a good-lookin' man here last week — his name was Page Emlyn; ain't that just the grandest name! But go *on* — you ain't tellin' me one thing about your trip an' all. I'm goin' away on a trip myself this winter. Goin' to stay with a cousin of mine in Charleston, and my! but I'm crazy about it."

So for half an hour she rocked and talked, and then she sprang up with the same abruptness with which she had arrived.

"I got to go," she said, giving a little flirt to her skirts. "And here you haven't told me *one* thing about your trip — not one thing — but I'm coming over some day soon and have a *real* sure 'nough talk with you. It certainly is grand to have you back, and I know somebody else is glad you've come home. You just ask James Calvert if he ain't! Ough! Ain't it getting cold?" she shivered a little as she started down the steps. "Well good-by, honey! It certainly is good to have you back. . . . You look mighty grand." Her conversation came back in snatches as she went down the garden path. At the gate she called something about *crazy* and *scared to death*, and as she crossed the road to her own house, one faint remark, in which the word *grand* was all that Hester caught, floated back, and then "silence like a poultice came to heal the blows of sound."

## ENTER THE PRINCE

Hester always had a feeling after one of Tessie's ebullitions of conversation that those hard-worked words "grand" and "crazy" must have been forced to crawl off hand in hand to some secluded spot in the world of words, and there fling themselves down to sleep off their exhaustion.

The sun was resting his chin on the Shadow Mountains now, to take a last golden look into the valley, like a little boy peeping over a forbidden fence. Presently he would let go and drop behind the mountains, and Hester's first day at home would be over. Even now the sharp chill of an October evening was creeping into the air, and she rose with a little shiver and went into the house. As she passed slowly through the hallway and up to her own room, the grey evening atmosphere of the whole house, in its dear remembered familiarity, seemed to catch and hold her in a close embrace of welcome. In her own chamber she moved softly about, changing her dress for the evening, and pausing every now and then to give a little caressing touch of greeting to the different well-known articles of the room. When she was dressed she went over to the open window, and throwing a shawl about her shoulders sat down by it, looking out across the familiar landscape, over which the dusk was beginning to throw its faint veil of unreality. As she sat there looking forth, it came to her suddenly how many, many times she had sat at that very window looking at the shining valley, and dreaming her dreams; dreams which in those days had all been concerned with a glorious

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

quarrelled over a piece of land, and once having begun to hate, the Colonel had kept it up with a will, and with an intensity which lasted him to the day of his death, and may, for all anyone knows to the contrary, have lasted him for some time afterwards.

A man can scarcely be persistently hated for a number of years without its having some effect upon him, and it is certain that Judge Rymal wasted no love upon his enemy and neighbour, the Colonel. And Hester had always laid his aversion to James to his dislike of James' grandfather.

For a time after Colonel Calvert's death, his daughter-in-law Ann, who had been a Calvert herself, a distant cousin of the Calverts of the valley, and who had been wooed and married by Eustace Junior in Princess Ann County over in Virginia, and who possessed a fine spirit of her own, had struggled along on the farm. But at length finding it beyond her capacity she had been forced to sell the old place, and move into Willoughby, where she eked out the very meagre amount of the Calverts' former wealth that was left her by taking an occasional boarder or two.

It was probably because all of Willoughby, and the whole valley also, knew so well the Calverts' history and their tendencies, that James Calvert, because he was sober and hard working, was such a matter of wonderment and gratification to the country-side. It was this fact also which probably gained him such respect and popularity among all his own home people. For certainly the world at large does prefer an evi-

## ENTER THE PRINCE

dence of virtue to that of vice — for though there may be thrills of self-glorification in another's vice, still for every-day association, virtue is decidedly more comfortable. Besides almost every third person in Willoughby, secretly or openly, prided himself upon being the one whose word in season had kept James Calvert straight. So that even the thought of him brought a glow of self-satisfaction to at least a third of the community, which was of course a very material addition to his popularity.

As Hester sat there, her chin in her hand, her whole being was dominated by her love, sharpened a little perhaps by her father's opposition. She had gone away with James Calvert's image sacred in her heart, and through almost two years of a new life which had stretched and broadened her horizon on every side, she had kept that image as loyally sacred as ever. And now — now very soon she was to have her reward.

About her the lace of the curtains blew dreamily back and forth, touching her softly with their trailing draperies. The sharp evening wind stirred the hair on her forehead, and blew little fleeting kisses against her cheeks. The valley lay indistinct now in the wistful light of evening. To the west little flocks of yellow clouds moved in companies across the clear green sky, as one might say a school of dead gold fish swimming to their eternity.

Hester sighed faintly, a little happy breath of content. Her first day at home was going softly and tenderly into the past, and every dying breath of it was

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was glad to draw breath, and meet the world on a natural plane once more.

"Well, I reckon you *are* glad to see Hester," Cousin Lizzie remarked. "But supper's just ready now, so let's not keep it waiting or A'nt Ginnie's bread'll get all cold."

So saying she led the way into the dining-room, wiping her brow with her handkerchief as she went, for she had been superintending things in the kitchen, and, as always before a meal, she was a trifle warm and breathless.

As Hester entered the dining-room old Aunt Ginnie, the coloured woman who had been with the Rymals for years, burst into deep chuckles, her face all crinkled up, and her body shaken with mirth.

"What's the matter with you, Aunt Ginnie?" Hester asked, laughing herself in sympathy.

"Nothin', Miss Hessie. Nothin'; 'cept it jes' look so nat'al ter see you back ergin."

"Well, it *feels* natural to be back," Hester answered, with a happy intonation.

James Calvert dropped into his chair rather heavily.

"I tell you, Mrs. B," he said to Cousin Lizzie, "that supper looks mighty good to me, and I'm just about ready for it too, for I can just tell you, or anyone else who inquires, that I've had a ride and a half this day."

He was a big young man, tall, but rather heavy, with a heaviness which one was inclined to suspect might with time become rather unattractively pronounced. For the present, however, it merely gave him an air of great strength.



## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

He was handsome, with his florid dark face, crisp hair and brown eyes, and he looked powerful and strong and infinitely able to fight the world, and to take care of himself, and of anyone else whom he chose to take under his protection.

Looking at him in the light of eighteen months' absence, Hester told herself, with a little flush of exultation, that she had forgotten how handsome he was, and his look of reality and genuineness gave her a keen pleasure. There was certainly nothing in the slightest degree artificial about James Calvert.

He would have said himself that he was what he was by the grace of God, and he had never seen any reason for pretending to be anything else.

He prided himself, in fact, on his outspoken frankness — a frankness which it must be admitted was apt on occasions to become somewhat overbearing.

Though he was still in his early manhood, he had had a hard fight with the world, and he had not always won. He was decidedly on the winning side now, but one cannot fight the world with one's very heart and soul through the impressionable years of one's life without receiving some scars, however much one may be victorious in the end, and this is so perhaps because the world has been in the field so much longer than any poor frantic human being who may fling himself against it.

James had fought and won — won splendidly, all the valley said, and the *Willoughby News* was in the habit of speaking of him as "one of our most

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promising young citizens." But that he had not achieved his victory unscathed was attested by a certain bulldog look about his mouth, and by the uncompromising line which his lips made when closed.

For the present the look lent only firmness and character to his face; but exaggerated ever so slightly it might very easily grow into an expression which has never been considered attractive.

Perhaps this bulldog expression had become somewhat accentuated in the last few months; certainly Hester found herself suddenly struck by a change in his appearance which for the moment she could not quite place, but which disturbed her vaguely.

"Well, how was Greenbrier, James?" inquired the Judge, beginning to carve the ham in front of him, after the first excited questions and answers as to Hester's journey were over.

("Mind, Judge, that's a Todd's ham, and I don't want it ruined the very *first* time it's put on the table.")

"I'm not afraid of any man on earth, Lizzie, much less of a Todd's ham, so don't put me too much on my mettle with this piece of hog's meat, or I'll help to it with a gravy ladle, just to teach it not to try any of its old Virginia airs with me.")

"Old Greenbrier's all right," said James. "I was over in what they call the Jumping Creek Draft, looking up a man by the name of Johnson there — I want him for a witness in that Fletcher case, you know. It's a pretty bit of country, and it was a grand day for a ride, and I'd have enjoyed it all right if there hadn't

## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

been a very particular reason for my wanting to be here this morning," and he looked significantly across at Hester. "And when your train went by, and I caught that little glimpse of you, Hessie," he continued, "it was just all I could do not to turn right 'round in my tracks and ride back. (Yes, thank you, Mrs. B., I believe I will have some of that batter bread.) But I knew you'd understand it was an absolute necessity for me to go or I'd certainly have been at the station to meet you."

"Of course," said Hester, quickly. James' love for her had been an understood thing for so long that he did not dream of making any effort to conceal it before the Judge and Cousin Lizzie. But Hester, though she told herself sharply that it was silly, felt a little chill of embarrassment at his frankness creep over her, and to cover it, she rushed on with the conversation.

"O James," she cried, "such a funny thing happened this morning on the train. (Aunt Ginnie, these are just the very best biscuits I've eaten for a year and a half." "Dat so, Miss Hessie? Well, I cert'ly is tickled to have you sa' so.") "A man sat down in my section — the porter made him sit there while his berth was being made up, and presently we got to talking —"

"Do you mean to say he had the impertinence to *speak* to you?" James cut in sharply, while a flush of anger mounted to his forehead.

Hester regarded him a moment in surprise.

"Why, no, James," she said at length, "I believe I had the impertinence to speak to him first."

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## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

"Well, where was I?" she went on. "Oh yes," with a little laugh, "I had just spoken improperly to him—"

Cousin Lizzie laid down her fork.

"Now what *do* you mean, Hester?" she said, really distressed, for she was very fond of Hester. "I do think it was bad enough for you to speak to a strange young man anyway, and now you say you spoke *improperly*—" and she looked helplessly at Hester and then over at the Judge.

Hester and her father both broke into irresistible laughter, but Hester checked herself almost immediately. She always had a little twinge of remorse when she laughed at Cousin Lizzie.

"Never mind, Cousin Lizzie," she said, "that was just a joke."

"Oh, a *joke*," her cousin returned, reassured, but still a trifle bewildered. However, if Hester said it was a joke, she had faith to believe it was all right.

She knew extremely little about jokes herself, but she had come to understand that the strangest and most unaccountable things said in joke immediately became all right.

"Now for heaven's sake, Hester," said her father, "do get on with your story, before we get all balled up in another misunderstanding. (Yes, Lizzie, you may fill my cup once more, but I may as well tell you that I don't think one cup of tea will fatten me up a great deal, so don't you bank too much on it.)"

James was devoting himself rather silently to his supper.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"Well, for the goodness' sake!" Cousin Lizzie exclaimed.

"*You* spoke to him, Hessie?" James said.

Hester grew a little angry.

"Now *don't* any of you be silly!" she said. "I *think* I spoke to him first, I don't really remember, but anyway it was all perfectly right and proper."

"Oh, but Hester, I don't think it is very *proper* to speak to a man you don't know," Cousin Lizzie objected.

"Very well, then, Cousin Lizzie," Hester returned, "it was all perfectly right and *improper*," and looking up she caught a twinkle in her father's eyes, and on the instant all her small amount of vexation vanished away in laughter.

It is delightful to have one person at least out of all the world who perfectly understands one, and Hester could always rely on her father for this. Nevertheless, she could not help now a little far-away stab of disappointment that the twinkle of laughter should have looked out of her father's eyes instead of her lover's.

The latter's face still looked perturbed, but he said, "Well, never mind, I expect it was all right — go ahead and tell us the rest. (Yes, thank you, sir, I believe I will have another slice of that ham.)"

"It was all right, James, you may take my word for it," Hester said, and she smiled affectionately across at him, her conscience pricking her a little for her momentary disappointment at his failure to understand.

## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

"Well, where was I?" she went on. "Oh yes," with a little laugh, "I had just spoken improperly to him—"

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## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

anyway I know *you* couldn't do anything wrong if you tried."

Whereat Hester was again astonished by a leap of irritation which prompted her to say, "Well, for goodness' sake then, *don't* call me *Hessie* for I just hate it!"

She was overwhelmed and conscience-stricken at this unaccountable exasperation, but again she controlled herself with an effort and answered sweetly:

"Thank you, James."

Which tempts one to pause here and write a brief essay on the Things One Thinks as Compared to the Things One Says.

"And now," said the Judge, "since Jove is appeased let us try another subject."

At the words Hester shot a quick resentful look at him. It was bad enough that she, who was in love with James, should be vexed with him, but that her father, who had no affection for him, should be quietly laughing at him, was quite unendurable.

Juno expects people to tremble at Jove's thunder, and if instead they are amused at it, she is mystified, if she is a simple-minded creature, or exceedingly indignant if she is the reverse—I make my humble apologies for my inability to remember which kind of a creature Juno was.

Hester was not simple-minded, therefore the amusement in her father's eyes was hard to bear. Yet for all her anger against him she could not help a chill, uneasy feeling that there must be something wrong



## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

with a thunder which amused people instead of terrifying them.

James was also irritated by the Judge's words, though he was not quite sure the latter meant anything disagreeable by them; and he reminded himself, anyway, that the old Buster, as he mentally designated the Judge, always had disliked him on account of the quarrel with his grandfather. And it flashed virtuously through James' mind that it was a pity to see a man of the Judge's years still carrying on his old hates.

"Well, you didn't tell us, James, whether you found the witness you went after," Judge Rymal went on in a moment pleasantly.

His blade was a nimble one which made its stab and sheathed itself so quickly that one was left guessing if he had really meant to strike or not.

"Oh yes, I found him all right," James returned, his face clearing. Evidently the Judge meant nothing after all by his former remark.

"He wasn't much taken, though," he went on, "with the idea of having to come over here to Willoughby all of court week, and tried to put up a big bluff about having a sick wife or baby, or something. But I let him understand that sort of foolishness didn't go with me — that he'd better show up all right, or I'd know the reason why."

"Oh, but James, perhaps his wife really was sick," Hester protested.

"Sick nothing," James returned. "I saw her going about the house just as well as anybody." His man-

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

ner was rough but he was not aware of it, and he would not for the world have been rude to Hester. Unconsciously, however, his tone slipped back into a counterpart of the hectoring one he had employed in his interview with the unfortunate Loyd Johnson.

"Well, then, perhaps it was his baby," Hester persisted.

"No, sir, it was just a whine in hopes I'd let him off so he could get through with his corn-shucking. But I yanked him up standing all right. You have to treat those kind of people that way or they'll do you every time."

"But I do think it is hard on him to be dragged over here to Willoughby right in the midst of his corn-shucking," Hester said.

"Oh, I suppose it is *hard* on him, all right," James returned. "But the law's the law, you know, and people have got to pay proper attention to it. Besides there's a lot of hard things in this world, and if you put in too much time being sorry for other people, I've found you don't get very far yourself. I believe in a man looking after himself and his own family, and letting the rest of the world look after itself," said James, gesticulating with one big open palm while he laid down this simple rule of life.

"O James!" cried Hester, "I can't bear to have you talk so — you —" Her remark was interrupted by a rustle of skirts, and a little scream, and there in the doorway stood Tessie Bedinger.

"For gracious' sakes!" she cried. "You all still

## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

at supper? You certainly must be big eaters. And as for that James Calvert — um — um — I know *him* — he's just a pig when it comes to beat biscuit! Pig! Pig! Pig! And those certainly are pretty looking ones. No, Mis' Blair, thank y'm, I've just this minute got up from the table at home. Hessie Rymal, everybody on *earth's* coming to see you to-night. I thought I'd just run over and tell you."

"In that case," said Hester, rising, "we had better go into the parlour and prepare to face the world." She laughed as she spoke with a cheerful enough air, but deep in her heart there was a little dreary feeling that something was vaguely wrong with her universe. What was it? She was bewildered by the unaccountability of her feelings, and also she began to be aware that her head ached a little and that she was rather tired. With the realization of her fatigue her perplexity cleared slightly, and her heart gave a little bound of hope. That was it, of course, she was worn out by her journey and the excitement of the day, and so, of course, things jarred unreasonably upon her. The thought comforted her; and reassured and cheered, she flung herself bravely into the gaiety of the evening which followed.

Tessie had said that the whole world was coming to see her, and certainly nearly all of the young people of Willoughby and of the nearby farms put in an appearance, which was perhaps about as near to the truth as Tessie's statements ever came. But even then there was not such an overwhelming number of people pres-

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ent. For I suppose there are scarcely more than fifty families, all told, in Willoughby and its vicinity who can be considered as belonging to the first circles of society, and therefore the number of young people that can be collected for any festivity is correspondently small. Yet when they were all collected in one room they made quite a gay and party-like scene, and kept Cousin Lizzie and Aunt Ginnie busy handing cake and ice-cream, which, anticipating some such event, in celebration of Hester's home-coming, Cousin Lizzie had had prepared beforehand.

It was a medley of conversation, ejaculation, laughter and little shrieks from the girls — to which their bright dresses lent a kaleidoscope of colour.

And Hester flung herself into it all heart and soul. She had a gay word and laugh for everybody, and her cheeks grew pink and her eyes shone. For truly it was delightful to be at home, and to have all these dear home people come to tell her they were glad to have her back once more.

And here one might pause and introduce the reader to a number of the young people present, all of whom possess more or less interesting stories of their own. The Irwins, for instance, who owned the farm at the head of the valley, where one always gets such delicious maple sugar in the spring; or the Millers, who always said they were cousins of the Calverts but whom the Calverts repudiated. Or again, George Sylvester, whose father owned a farm back in the county where his front gate was nine miles from his front door, with

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his back yard stretching down the mountain side a matter of five or six miles further, and where in strawberry time the cattle came in with their hoofs bright red from trampling the crushed berries. I might, as I say, introduce the reader to these young people, and to the rest, but I refrain from doing so, for after all there are only two of them with whom this story is really concerned. And these two are Dorothy Calvert and Richard Breeze. Richard was a cousin of Hester's on her father's side, and Dorothy was James Calvert's sister; she was also a remarkably pretty girl, small and slight, with a pair of very deep blue eyes, and a mass of soft gold hair. She was very young at that time — only eighteen — and was a gentle, sweet little person who spoke rarely. Richard Breeze, however, was perfectly satisfied with her as she was. He was, indeed, far more than satisfied. They came to the Rymals' together, and if Richard had had his way, they would have begun at once to go through life together.

Dolly, however, was not at all prepared for anything of that kind as yet. She liked Richard very much — as who could help doing? But she was not in love with him. In fact, if Dorothy Calvert were in love with anyone it was with Hester Rymal. Hester was very fond of Dolly, but it used sometimes to make her uncomfortable to look up and always behold those very large blue eyes fixed adoringly upon her. She was apt to feel that she was on a pedestal from which she must be very careful not to slip off. Poor little Dolly Calvert! She was very young, and very ignorant

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of life that night, but it was not long before she began to grow up.

"Richard Breeze looks at Dolly all the time, but Dolly looks at Hester," Tessie Bedinger giggled to a young man with whom she was sharing the sofa.

"That's so," he assented. "And who do you reckon Miss Hester looks at?"

"Oh, I reckon she knows where to look all right," Tessie returned. "Anyhow I know who looks at her."

"Who?" asked her companion.

Tessie nodded over toward the fireplace, where James Calvert was standing resting one arm on the corner of the mantle. He was not talking to anyone, but his bright brown eyes were fixed upon Hester. He looked strong and alert and happy, and one guessed that the world was going well with him.

"Oh," said the young man by Tessie.

"Exactly, O — O-h!" Tessie assented with her sharp little giggle.

So the evening wore away and it was late before the last visitor had said good-by. So late that glancing at the clock Hester felt herself overwhelmed with weariness, and involuntarily she hoped that James would not stay much longer now. He was out on the porch seeing the last of the guests off. Hester heard Tessie's little shrill voice saying something, and his laugh in reply, and then all was quiet outside, and presently James came back into the parlour. He was still laughing.

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"That little Tessie," he said, "isn't much to look at, but she certainly is a cute little thing."

He flung himself back in a chair with a sigh of satisfaction, but Hester did not sit down. She was standing by the mantelpiece, and she looked somehow very tall and very white.

"James," she said, "I'm awfully tired — I'm afraid I'll have to say good-night now." In spite of herself her voice quivered a little, and indeed she looked very much exhausted.

James sprang up. "Why, you poor darling!" he cried. "You do look tired to death, I ought to have noticed," and with the words he came eagerly toward her.

Hester stood perfectly still as he approached. Her face was very pale and her grey eyes were suddenly wide with a strange expression. Yet she did not move.

James was not aware of her look, and when he was close beside her he made a little sound in his throat — a wordless caress, and flinging his arms about her, he caught her to him passionately. For one half instant Hester lay still in his embrace. Then something snapped within her, and with a low hoarse cry she flung herself erect and struggled to be free.

For a second or two James held her laughing, but all at once he caught sight of her face. Instantly he dropped his arms in astonishment, and Hester sprang back from him half the length of the room.

"Why, Hester!" he cried, overwhelmed. "Why, what on earth's the matter?"

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Hester stood away from him catching her breath in little sobs, her hands pressed hard against her breast, revulsion, surprise, and a white bewilderment in her face.

"Why, Hester! Why, darling, what is it? What's the matter?" James persisted.

"O James! — Oh — oh, I —" her voice trailed away into silence. Uncertainly she sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

James was very much alarmed. He came over quickly and knelt down beside her. Involuntarily she shrank deeper into the chair.

"Don't be frightened, darling, don't —" he pleaded. "I won't touch you if you mind. What's the matter? Can't you tell me what it is? Did I startle you? I'm so sorry."

Hester took her hands down from her face. Her eyes were free from tears, but her expression was poignant with misery.

"Don't mind — you mustn't mind me, James," she panted to say. "It's just because — oh, because I'm so tired," she broke off piteously.

James got to his feet, his face clearing.

"Of course, darling — of course, you must be worn out — I was a great brute not to know it."

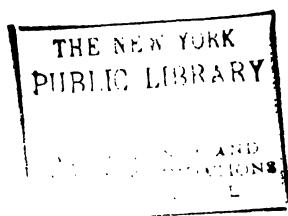
He was very much relieved, for with mankind in general he believed that extreme fatigue might account for any unreasonableness on a woman's part.

"I'll go right off, and leave you to get a good night's rest, sweetheart," he said, and with the words he took





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## EXIT HIS HIGHNESS

one of her limp little hands in his, and stooping kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Good night, dearest — *dearest!* The world's a different place to me since you came home again. Remember, darling, all my happiness is held in your two little hands."

And so he was gone, and in a moment Hester heard the front door bang behind him.

Trembling a little she rose, and crept up-stairs to her own room. There she stole over to the window and looked out, even as she had looked out that afternoon. The yard was bright with moonlight, and Hester could see James going down the path. He walked with a spring in his step and his clear whistle came up to her, and sharply there came, too, the remembrance of his last words, "Remember, darling, all my happiness is held in your two little hands."

Hester sank down upon the floor, and putting her hands on the low window seat she buried her face in them, her heart standing still before a terrible revelation.

When he had taken her in his arms, the curtain of her inner life had lifted suddenly, and she had stood face to face with the truth.

She no longer loved James Calvert.

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and still in her bed, staring into the dark and facing the dreadful truth which the evening before had revealed.

That she should cease to love James Calvert was yesterday morning a wholly undreamed of possibility; this morning that she had ever loved him was equally unbelievable.

Hester was crushed by the overwhelming truth, and bowed down to the very dust by remorse and humiliation.

She no longer loved James Calvert. All her racing and tormented thoughts of herself led up to that astonishing fact, and all her thoughts of him led up to that other fact voiced by his words, "Remember, darling, all my happiness is held in your two little hands." As the words came back to her she made a little movement among her pillows of involuntary irritation. It was like James Calvert, she thought, to put his love in such a trite phrase. But alas! and alas! her conscience told her sharply, it was like him also, once he loved, to love with all the power that was in him, and to continue to do so.

She no longer loved him, yet he loved her with all the strength of his passionate nature.

James Calvert had never loved anybody but Hester Rymal in all his life. Never even so much as looked at any of the other girls; and now she no longer loved him. Over and over her thoughts came back miserably to this point.

James had striven very hard for many things in his life, but of them all Hester Rymal's love had meant

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more to him than anything else. It was the very breath of his nostrils, the wellspring of all his hopes, the consummation to which his toil had looked. And indeed had not Hester every reason to know this?

With a little half-stifled sob she buried her face deep among the pillows, cowering away in their soft depths from the clutch of life that had gripped her in almost the moment of her slipping back into the old mosaic of her home surroundings.

Her remorse and humiliation were very sharp — sharpened perhaps somewhat by the remembrance of her defiant self of yesterday, standing up proudly before her father, so sure in her arrogant self-reliance that she would marry James Calvert.

So far, she had always found herself equal in her gay independence to whatever had faced her out of life, and now to be suddenly confronted by the fact that she had made a terrible mistake was an overwhelming shock to her self-confidence.

"Oh," she cried to herself, "how *could* it have happened!" How *could* she ever have made herself believe such a thing? Could her year and a half of a wider life have made her outgrow her love, stretched and broadened her beyond what had before seemed to her desirable, and worthy of admiration?

Hester had a keen devotion to all that made up her home atmosphere, whetted particularly just now by her return, and the thought that her eighteen months spent with her aunt should have tricked her into a taste beyond her home environments was a sharply

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

humiliating thought. Yet her clearness of perception told her it was not true. It was not that she had outgrown her home tastes, but her months of change and travel had given her a certain perspective in which everything showed up more truly and clearly. In this clarifying light of time and distance the glamour of old association and childhood's hero worship that had surrounded James had fallen away, and with a sudden clearness she saw him as he really was — not as she had supposed him to be.

Hester's nature was a very honest one. And once having discovered that she did not love James Calvert, no amount of remorse or of pity for him could trick her back into a belief that she still cared for him. No, she did not love him — she could never again love him; the fact was stamped forever upon her consciousness by the remembrance of the sudden overpowering revulsion of feeling that had swept upon her on the instant that he had taken her in his arms. It had been a breathless, an astonishing realization. His manner and tone had jarred upon her all through the evening, but it was not until his arms closed around her that she had known the truth. In that moment of sick revulsion Hester Rymal could almost have done murder to be free.

At last the rainy dawn came, and Hester arose and dressed herself, the dreariness of the day seeming a grey match for her spirit.

Down-stairs the house was enshrouded in the half light of a gloomy morning, the only spots of cheerfulness

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being the open fires in parlour and dining-room, and the lamp upon the breakfast table, whose light made the silver and glass wink and twinkle in response. But these little breaths of geniality seemed to Hester merely oases where one might escape for the moment only from the desert of encircling gloom and depression.

At breakfast Cousin Lizzie was silent and preoccupied with the setting in order of the long train of household duties leading up to the consummation of dinner; moreover a leak had suddenly appeared in the linen closet — such an undesirable place for a leak to appear, for anybody knows that leaks and linen are far from a satisfactory combination.

The Judge was not of himself depressed, but after one or two sallies he became aware of the gloomy atmosphere of his ladies, and thereafter retired at once and discreetly into the seclusion of his own serene thoughts, which made for him, as it were, a cosy inward fireside.

After breakfast Hester moved aimlessly about the house. The first burst of excitement over her home-coming was past, but she had not as yet dropped back into the tranquillity of her every-day routine of life. She felt a feverish desire to get away somewhere, to escape from the turbulence and unrest of her own thoughts.

"Cousin Lizzie," she said abruptly, encountering that lady in the parlour. "I'm going for a ride — I must get a breath of fresh air, and I shall probably stop at Aunt Rachel's for dinner."

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"Well, Hester, I suppose you know it's raining," Cousin Lizzie remarked, merely stating the situation.

She crossed over to the window and looked out. "There!" she exclaimed. "There are your father's rubbers on the porch. I *knew* he didn't put them on when he went down to the stable. Did anybody ever *see* such a man! But you'd better get back to dinner, Hester, we're going to have the first mince pies."

"I know — I know, I'm sorry Cousin Lizzie, but I feel as though I must have some fresh air, you know I hate a rainy day in the house — and I do want to see Aunt Rachel." Hester spoke quickly, almost sharply.

"Well," Cousin Lizzie returned, "if you must go you'd better holler to Jim to saddle up for you; he's just gone down to the stable now with the milk for the calves."

The rain was steady, but it was not penetrating, and with a mackintosh over her habit Hester was warm and dry, and a certain sense of relief and of stretching her thoughts came to her, as settling herself in the saddle she gathered up the reins, and felt the sweep and largeness of out-of-doors take hold upon her.

The roads were not very soft yet, and Hester's little mare, Sparkle, a light well-made bay, went down the driveway to the gate on eager, dancing feet. Outside on the high road Hester let her out in a long free gallop.

The damp heavy air, with its sweet perfume of wind-driven autumn leaves and wet earth, blew against her cheeks and brought a life and sparkle to her eyes. The fields, freshened and greened by the rain, went smoothly by, with here and there a splash of yellow



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and red where a hickory or sumach bush flashed past.

The little mare's feet beat softly, plop, plop, along the road, with every now and then the splatter of a squashed mud puddle. The rain came steadily down, and the heavy moisture-laden mists crept moodily up the parti-coloured mountains, and it was all movement and freedom and vivacity; and by the time Hester had reached her destination something of her depression had been swept away.

Mrs. Crozier, whom Hester called Aunt Rachel, though there was no real relationship between them, only the closest of old-time friendships, lived on the other side of Willoughby, with a stretch of low hills between her place and the village.

She had been Mrs. Rymal's especial friend after the latter married and came to Calvert's Valley to live, and after Mrs. Rymal's death, Mrs. Crozier transferred her affectionate friendship to Hester.

She had seen Hester cantering up the road to the house, and she smiled and waved her hand from the window, but she did not rush out to greet her. She was a very large woman and a very placid one and she was of the opinion that a tranquil receptiveness of manner, and a habit of being where one expected to find her, was more conducive to satisfactory friendships than any jerky effusiveness.

Miss Eliza Phillibrown, however, who lived with her as companion, — Mrs. Crozier being without any near relatives, — met Hester in the hall and overwhelmed her with welcome and protestations.

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"My dear! What a day to come out in! When did you get back? Why, you must be wet to the skin! It's mighty sweet to see you — here, let me take that coat out to the kitchen to be dried. Dear me! What a day — but what a lot you must have to tell us!"

Hester laughed and returned her kisses, and then went into the parlour to be gathered into Mrs. Crozier's arms, and to feel in her embrace the peace of her large serenity.

"My dearest child — how glad I am to get you home again!" Mrs. Crozier said. "Now sit down there by the fire — I know you must be damp — and tell me all about everything."

Though the day was gloomy without, in the parlour was the effect of sunshine; it might have been due to the fire upon the hearth, or to a large yellow cat dozing upon one of the chairs who made a bright spot of colour, or again it might have been the splash of pink and blue worsted on the table at Mrs. Crozier's elbow, but probably most of all it was the genial radiance of Mrs. Crozier's own white-haired personality.

She was a woman who, though she had been born in Willoughby, had, after her marriage, seen a good deal of the outside world. At the death of her husband, however, the old home remembrances had laid hold upon her once more and she had come back to live in the valley; for, she said, "I like a foothold in the country. And besides I think country friendships get a tighter grip upon one than those of the city."

She was still apt, however, to close her house in the

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winter and go away to different cities during the coldest and muddiest months of the year.

Hester sat down by the cosy fire, with a grateful sense of the comfort and cheer surrounding her. She had never found this comfort wanting whenever she turned to her Aunt Rachel. Cousin Lizzie was very dear and good, but then Cousin Lizzie's province was looking after people's bodies, whereas Mrs. Crozier found that people's souls interested her more. Human nature appears to be rather limited, certainly it is very unusual for one to find anybody who is capable of ministering both to our souls and bodies.

Mrs. Crozier settled herself in her large easy-chair and took up her knitting. The yellow cat awoke, yawned, and stretched himself, and then with a little low murmur of apology, half purr, half mew, jumped down from his chair and springing on to Mrs. Crozier's knee settled himself there with a matter-of-fact contentment.

Hester smiled, it was all such a tranquilly familiar scene.

"Whose blanket are you knitting now, and whose story is going into it?" she asked with a little laugh.

Mrs. Crozier was always knitting baby blankets and each one was apt to go off to the narration of some friend's troubles or confidences.

"Oh, my dear, this is a very dull affair," Mrs. Crozier returned. "In the first place it's for the last Flaxcomb baby, and you know their style — round eyes, round nose, round mouth, bald heads, — regular babies, of

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course, but not very original. And then you know Eliza has taken up physical culture by correspondence, and I've really heard very little for the last few weeks but the increased measurement of her chest — I'm looking to you to put a little life and reality into it." She glanced up with a smile which was checked suddenly by the shadow that had fallen on Hester's face.

"However," she went on quickly, "we'll wait until after dinner for excitement — there's the bell now."

Miss Eliza Phillibrown came into dinner a trifle late; she entered with the mincing importance of a little bird.

"You must excuse me for being late, Hester, dear child," she said, "but you see my physical culture duties are really quite onerous, and before every meal I am instructed to go out into the open air and breathe eight times."

"Oh," said Hester, with the proper show of interest. "But do you only breathe before meals?"

"Yes, just before meals — and oh, yes, when I retire too. Eight times before each meal and eight times before going to bed, yes," said Miss Eliza, with happy unconsciousness. "And, Hester, have you ever taken up breathing?"

"Well, of course I do breathe," said Hester; "but I don't know that I ever went into it very deeply."

"Oh, that's just the important point — to breathe *deep*," Miss Eliza went on eagerly; in her enthusiasm and excitement she even drew a deep breath now in illustration, shutting her eyes to do so. "The way

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you do it is to breathe in at one nostril and out at the other, hem'm'm." Miss Eliza was apt to wind up her remarks with a gentle long-drawn-out sigh, half assent, half question.

"But I should think you'd get mixed up," Hester objected. "I should think there'd be danger of breathing out at the nostril you should have breathed in at, or breathing in at the nostril you should have breathed out at, or of breathing in and out at the right side when you should have breathed out and in at the left."

Miss Eliza watched Hester with a breathless interest as the latter permitted her mind to wander through the intricacies of all the possible varieties of deep breathing.

"Dear me," she said, "I never thought of how many mistakes one might make." She looked worried. "However," she exclaimed, brightening up, "if you really concentrate your thoughts on one nostril at a time dismissing everything else from your mind, you are not likely to have much trouble, hem'm'm. But the great difficulty about the whole thing," Miss Eliza went on confidentially, "is that my instructor wishes me to send him my weight net."

"Net?" questioned Hester.

Miss Eliza flushed slightly.

"Yes, er — *disrobed*, you know," she answered deprecatingly, with a little shy bird glance over her thin shoulder, though the only servant present was Mrs. Crozier's elderly coloured woman. "And, of course," she went on, "that really is very hard to

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manage, as the only big scales on the place are down at the stable in the harness room."

For one fleeting moment Hester had a mental vision of Miss Eliza's figure, net, walking down the long slope of the lawn to the stable, in the dew and mists of the early dawn.

"Oh," she said. "Really, Miss Eliza, I don't see just how you *do* manage."

Miss Eliza leaned a little nearer; one guessed that Hester as an old friend was to be admitted to an unusual confidence.

"Well, I'll tell you," she said, dropping her voice slightly. "I thought about it a good deal, and at last one day when I knew no—no *man* was about the place, I slipped into a wrapper and put a rain coat over that, and put on my shoes, and — and *nothing* else, and then I stole down to the harness room, and locked the door — on the inside, of course — and hung my rain coat over the window, and *then* — I weighed."

"Oh!" cried Hester, breathlessly, "with your shoes and wrapper still on?"

"No," said Miss Eliza; and then after a long moment she added the single dramatic word — "*Without*."

One saw that it was one of the climaxes of Miss Eliza Phillibrown's life.

"And how much did you weigh — without?" Hester asked.

"Just one hundred and two pounds and three quarters. And my instructor says with my height I ought to weigh a hundred and twenty-three pounds

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and a half — so you see I still have a good deal to work for, hem'm'm."

"Yes," said Hester, thoughtfully, and let her eyes just wander in Aunt Rachel's direction. But Aunt Rachel's head was bent serenely over her plate, and she refused to respond to Hester's look. That was one thing about her, her friends were her friends, and not to be laughed at, unless they saw the joke themselves.

Back in the parlour after dinner Miss Eliza again excused herself.

"You see, Hester, I have to lie down after every meal for a little while and relax. The directions are most explicit about that."

"And what would happen if you didn't?" Hester inquired.

"Why, something happens to the alimentary canal if you don't — but I can't just remember what it is," Miss Eliza returned.

After her departure, Hester sat down on a low chair, and resting her chin on her knees stared into the fire.

"What is it — what's the trouble, dearest?" Mrs. Crozier said softly.

"O Aunt Rachel!" Hester burst out, and then stopped.

Mrs. Crozier laid down her knitting, her large white hands resting quietly upon the soft confusion of colours.

"Yes, dear?" she said.

"O Aunt Rachel!" Hester cried again, and then her words came with a little rush. "Oh, I don't love

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James Calvert after all!" She paused, regarding Mrs. Crozier a moment, and then fled on again with her confession. "We were engaged just the very night before I left — he came — and — and I thought I *did* love him then, but it's all a mistake — an awful, awful mistake! I don't love him now I've come back. I don't see how I could ever have loved him — and now what *shall* I do?" she cried. "O Aunt, I must tell you — I always do tell you things that trouble me — you or father — and I can't tell father this, because he — he doesn't like James anyway — he never did."

"James is still in love with you, I suppose," Mrs. Crozier said. If she was surprised or shocked there was nothing in her tone or manner to show it. Perhaps that was one reason why people found it easy to confide in her.

"Yes, oh yes!" Hester answered remorsefully. "That's the awful, dreadful part of it — it wouldn't be anything if it weren't for that — but he does — he loves me terribly still — oh, I'm not conceited to say that — I wish with all my heart it weren't so — but he's the kind of fellow who wouldn't love more than once, and then it would be with all his soul, really just with all his soul! And now it's all a dreadful mistake — I don't love him, and — and O Aunt Rachel, I feel as though I should wreck his whole life — and what *shall* I do?"

She paused, a mist of tears in her eyes, and her cheeks flushed.



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"There was a man," said Mrs. Crozier, "who talked of suicide when I married. He didn't do it, however; instead he got married himself six months afterwards. I think his life has been a very happy one."

"But James isn't like that — I know he isn't," Hester broke in, unhappily.

"That's just what I thought about the other man," said Mrs. Crozier in a little half aside to herself.

"Oh, don't you see what I'm afraid of?" Hester went on, a breathless fear in her voice. "I know he's fine and strong, but, but — oh, everybody knows the Calverts' inheritance, and I *do* think his love for me helped to keep him straight, and *now* —" she broke off.

"Oh," she went on again in a moment, "oh, Aunt Rachel, it's awful — the responsibility of a love like that. Father doesn't want me to marry James — I suppose he is afraid he may take to drinking too — but if I loved him I wouldn't be afraid of that. I always knew that I had to face a chance of that. But if I loved him," Hester clinched her hands, "I *know* I could keep him straight. You see I know James so well, and I can't help knowing that he has given me the very best and strongest thing in him — and you can't take love like that from a man without all the terrible responsibility of it. And now — oh, I don't know *what* I ought to do!" she cried.

"But you can't go on pretending you love him when you don't," Mrs. Crozier said quickly.

"No — no," Hester broke in — "Oh no, of course

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not; I couldn't pretend, — but I thought I might tell him the truth, and then — then I suppose if he still wanted me to marry him — I promised, you know."

"Do you think he'd be likely still to want you to?" Mrs. Crozier asked.

"I don't know," said Hester, miserably.

"And if he did, do you think you could stand it?" the other went on. "I tell you, Hester, there's a kind of every-dayness about a man after you marry him that would require a great deal of love for a nature like yours to stand — and without love — No," she broke off, "no, I won't advise you one way or the other."

She took one of Hester's hands in her large white one. "You've got to decide it alone, poor little child," she said, "and you've got to make up your mind what you can stand and what you can't — and you must decide what is right for yourself as well as what is right for James — your happiness counts with God just as much as his, you know. But, dearest, whichever way you decide, I'm afraid it will mean a great deal of unhappiness for you."

"Oh, it's not my unhappiness — it's his I care about!" Hester answered quickly. Nevertheless she drew a little breath of relief as she rose to go. Though Mrs. Crozier had professed not to give any advice, still there was comfort and strength and a certain clarifying of ideas in her words.

"Thank you, Aunt Rachel," Hester said simply, as she kissed her good-by.

## WHEN LOVE PROVES VARIABLE

After Hester had gone Mrs. Crozier picked up her knitting with a little sigh. The blanket bid fair to be more interesting than she had expected, but she wished in her heart that it had kept to Miss Eliza's deep breathing and chest measurements for its motive.

It was on her way home that Hester came to her decision.

At the top of one of the little hills she drew Sparkle to a standstill, and looked down upon the valley spread below her. The rain had stopped at last, and the late afternoon sun struggling through the clouds was drawing the mists softly up into the sky. The landscape seemed freed of a depressing blanket, and lay cool and refreshed in the clearing light of afternoon, while the river and each little meandering stream gave forth a silver flash. There was a delicate sharp sincerity over the whole prospect, and all that serene honesty of out-of-doors seemed to speak to what was true and honest in Hester's own soul. And there upon the top of the little hill she made her decision, knowing deep within herself what was possible for her and what was not.

"I will not marry James Calvert, God help me," she whispered. "But oh!" she added sharply, "God help *him* most of all!"

## CHAPTER V

### TO HAVE LOVED AND LOST

JAMES CALVERT stretched his huge figure in the depths of an easy-chair before the fire, and sighed comfortably.

He had had a good supper, the room was warm and cosy, Hester sat near him by the centre table at work on some delicate embroidery, and James felt at peace with the world.

He had worried a little over Hester's strange outburst of the night before, but his day had been filled with absorbing business, and this evening when he had come she had seemed perfectly natural and tranquil, and his uneasiness had therefore been entirely laid to rest.

"Gee!" he said. "It certainly has been a mean day — I was slopping about in the rain all the morning, but I believe it's going to be clear for to-morrow all right."

Hester turned her embroidery nervously in her hands; she was confronted by the decision she had come to that afternoon on the hilltops, when the valley had lain in the clearing light of coming fair weather, and when the truth had faced her undeniably, but

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now that the time of its accomplishment had arrived her heart was beginning to beat very fast.

"What happens to-morrow?" she said, her voice sounding strange and tense in her own ears.

"Why, to-morrow the Rich Creek Lumber Company's attorney and timber inspector are coming down to go over that Sweet Run tract of land, and I believe it's as good as sold. They said if they found the titles sound and their inspector found the timber as specified, they'd come down with my figure. I tell you, I've worked like a dog over this deal, and if it goes through — and I can't see how there can be any hitch anywhere — I'll get a nice fat commission out of it, and *then*, Hester, darling, you know what's going to happen," and he looked over at her with love in his eyes.

Hester disentangled a skein of silks with fingers that shook a little, yet she forced a smile in answer to his look. Oh, not yet — she could not tell him yet! Her remorse and the remembered childhood's association stabbed her sharply.

"Do you remember my telling you who their attorney is?" James asked, watching Hester, contentedly.

Hester shook her head absently, "No, who is he?" she asked.

"Why, your friend Page Emlyn," he answered, laughing. "Look here, Hester," he went on, "you didn't think I really cared about your talking with him, did you? I didn't care a bit, truly I didn't — I know I can trust my little girl all right."

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"*Now!*" Hester cried sharply to herself, for his words jarred upon her.

"James," she began desperately, but then she stopped. How could she do it?

"Well," he said, leaning toward her "you weren't really mad with me about it were you, dearest?"

Mechanically Hester took up again the embroidery she had dropped. "Oh, not yet — not yet —" her thoughts pleaded.

"No, James," she said out loud — "Oh no, of course I wasn't angry about that."

James left his chair and sat down in one close beside her, and Hester's heart began to bound in great suffocating leaps.

"My little sweetheart," he said, "I knew you weren't really. Darling, sweetest, I have a secret to tell you."

He paused a moment and Hester felt her nerves tightening to the snapping point.

"Sweetheart," he went on, "Sweetheart, I love you," he laughed. "What would life be without you — but that's not the secret," he added, laughing again. "The secret's this. You know that little stretch of land with the clump of maple trees, where you get such a nice view down the valley and across at the river?"

Hester nodded, her eyes tense on her work.

"Do you recollect we used to play there under those big limestone rocks. I remember you said once, when you were grown you were going to have a house and live there. I can see you just as plain, standing

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there on the rock in the wind and sunshine — just a little scrap of a girl. But I've remembered it and worked for it ever since, and, darling, I bought the land this morning, and that's where you shall live."

With a low sharp exclamation Hester flung down her work and buried her face in her hands.

"O James, James!" she cried in an agony of contrition.

James stared at her blankly.

"Why, Hester — why, dearest, are you ill? Did you hurt yourself — why, what's the matter, darling?" he begged anxiously, as he tried to draw her hands down from her face, his eyes full of a sharp concern.

Hester put his hands aside and, starting up abruptly, she took a few feverish steps toward the fire, but turning came back again and caught the back of her chair in a tense grip. The tears were on her cheeks and where her hands clutched the chair her knuckles showed white.

"Hester, sweetheart, what is it?" James pleaded.

"Oh," she began in a breathless voice. "Oh, I must tell you — you've got to know it — it's — it's — O James, it's all a mistake — my dreadful, awful mistake." She paused, gathering herself together, while James waited, his eyes upon her face.

"James, I don't love you," she said at last, her voice colourless in its very intensity of emotion.

The words were out at last, in all their undisguised cruelty, and suddenly Hester felt her strength give way, and still clinging to the chair she crept slowly

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round it and sank down on the seat. The upholstery of it was a dull red, and in her white dress with her black hair and pale face she made a sharp picture.

"You don't love me?" James spoke slowly in a stunned voice.

Hester was silent — what was the good of repetition?

James laughed suddenly. "You're playing with me, Hester," he cried hoarsely. "It's a joke, but I see it all right, you can't fool me."

Hester moved quickly. "Oh no — no! It's true James — you *must* see it's true!" she cried.

"Not *true*, Hester?" he said.

Hester caught her breath in a little sob, for the lost bewildered look of his face.

"Yes, James, true," she said.

For an instant he looked at her in silence, then he burst out passionately.

"But it can't be true — it can't be, I tell you — you've been mine always — why, I can't remember the time when I wasn't counting on you — working for you, loving you — struggling to bring out the best that was in me for you — you, *you*, my darling, my beautiful! Why, Hester, dearest, what's the matter — what have I done? Didn't I show my love enough? I know I haven't said much, I don't think I'm that kind of a fellow — but it's all, *all* been for you right straight along, all my whole *life's* been for you — Oh it can't be true —" he broke off.

The tears were slipping down Hester's cheeks, but she answered steadily, "It *is* true James."



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"Then *why* is it true?" he cried fiercely and roughly. "You care for somebody else — you've found somebody among those new people that you've been going with that has made you false to me — that's stolen you away from me. And I suppose it's their damned money you're after. They've taught you to look down on what's been good enough for you all your life — but I'll have you to know," he cried furiously, "the Calverts were gentlemen living on their own estates when most of the people you've been with — damn 'em — were grubbing behind counters; but they've got the money now, and the Calverts haven't, and it's the money you're after!"

"James," said Hester, gently, for surely she had no right to resent anything he might say to her — "there isn't anybody else."

"Isn't there?" he cried eagerly. "Do you swear it Hester — do you?"

"Yes, yes — of course I swear I don't love anybody else," she answered.

"Then you *must* love me — I can make you care — you've *got* to love me," he cried wildly. He was kneeling by her now, and had seized both her hands.

"I'll do anything on God's earth you want me to, darling, sweetest, only you *must* love me, you *must*!" he cried.

"O James — dear James, I'm so sorry — so sorry — but it's no use — I can't, I know I can't — and — and we couldn't be happy; you know we wouldn't."

It was too much for James Calvert, and with a

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wild abandonment he dropped his head upon the arm of the chair and burst into passionate sobs.

The tears ran down Hester's own cheeks, and she put her shaking hands on his head.

"Poor boy — oh, poor, poor boy," she said brokenly.

At her touch he caught her hands and looked up. "Oh — it's a mistake — you do care — you do — O darling, *say* it's a mistake," he begged, covering her hands with frantic kisses.

"O my poor boy, it's not a mistake — it's not," Hester answered.

He still knelt at her feet and looked at her with the dumb misery of an animal.

"O James, dear, I know how awful it is," she cried, consumed with pity and remorse. "I have been wicked, *wicked* — but oh, it was just because I was mistaken — not because I meant to — and I beg you — I beg you with all my soul to forgive me."

For a moment longer he knelt there, then he got slowly, terribly to his feet.

"Yes, I'll forgive you," he said harshly, "I'll forgive you when hell burns up."

He put either hand upon the arm of her chair and for a long moment he stood above her very tall and very overpowering, his eyes blazing down at her. Hester could feel the tremble of his hands as they gripped the chair. Then he spoke, furious love looking from his eyes.

"Hester," he said, "you are the most beautiful

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creature in all the world, and I love you with all my heart, and hate you with all my soul."

He straightened up slowly and drew his right hand back.

Hester thought he was going to strike her, and in that moment the pulses of her nature which had been beating with almost a nausea of intensity stopped suddenly and were calm. She felt as though she had passed through terrible tossing rapids, to emerge all at once into wide reaches of still water. The greatness that was in her rose suddenly and took possession of the situation.

"James," she said quietly, "are you going to strike me?"

She was not afraid for herself, she was beyond that, but she who had brought this tragedy upon the man must protect him from his own passionate weakness.

For an instant after she spoke James still stood in the same posture, then he dropped his hand.

"No — no, you beautiful devil," he said in a slow dazed voice, "I shan't strike you — a gentleman never strikes a woman — oh no — of course not," he laughed, "not even when she has damned his soul for all eternity."

And with the words he turned and went out of the room and out of the house.

Poor, poor James Calvert! He was the child of his forebears — a high-handed race of people who had always been passionate and uncontrolled in the face of adversity.

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Hester sat on in the still room. She heard the front door bang behind James and his footsteps going off down the path; she heard the clock tick steadily and softly, and on the hearth the low fire whispering to itself, and she was removed into a place of remorse that was beyond tears, and forever and forever, she would stand convicted in her own eyes for the cruel mistake she had made.

## CHAPTER VI

### DRINK AND THE DEVIL

It was early the next morning. Hester awoke uneasily from the sleep of exhaustion which the dawn had at last brought her. After the climax of the night before a dull inertia was upon her, and, for the time being, almost a sick aversion to the picking up of life again.

Wearily she slipped out of bed — in her white night-dress a wan little wraith of the morning — and going over to the window looked out through the protecting lace of her curtains.

It was a day full of movement and life, scudding clouds, sparkle and vivacity of sunshine.

All at once, as she looked forth, four horsemen swept into view from around the bend in the road, where it turns in front of the Rymals' house and then shoots straight away to Willoughby.

In front rode James Calvert, and beside him Hester recognized Page Emlyn. Behind them followed two other men. One was George Haymer, a mountaineer whom James often employed as guide, for he knew the calls to most of the timber tracts for miles around. The other man Hester did not know, but she supposed

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he must be the Rich Creek Lumber Company's timber inspector.

Hester guessed that they were on their way to look over the Sweet Run tract of timber, the selling of which had meant so much to James, and the thought brought back upon her a renewed sense of remorse.

Page Emlyn rode with the lightness and buoyancy of manner of one who met the world in a friendly and debonair spirit. Beside him James Calvert's figure looked tense and heavy.

Suddenly both horses pricked their ears and shied violently at a piece of newspaper blowing across the road.

Emlyn brought his mount round with light hands and an easy swing of his body, as though the spring of the animal under him was merely an answer to his own vivacity of temper. When Calvert's horse wheeled, however, his rider jerked him furiously back into the road, and rained a passion of angry blows upon him which sent the frantic animal plunging madly off up the road.

Hester winced, and shrank away from the window.

But if James Calvert did beat his horse like a savage, whose fault was it?

"Oh, poor, *poor* boy," she whispered with a sharp contrition.

"There's nothing like a newspaper to make a horse shy," out on the road, Page Emlyn was remarking to

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James, as, the little episode past, their horses came alongside once more.

James was staring straight ahead of him with a black scowl on his face. His hands were heavy on his horse's mouth, and every now and then he jerked the reins angrily.

His was the kind of nature which when it suffers desires with a blind ferocity to hurt somebody or something in return.

His horse, a nervous well-bred roan — the Calverts, no matter how poor they might be, had always managed to keep a good-looking horse or two — was fidgeting along, biting at his bit, and still snorting from the punishment he had received.

"Yes," Emlyn went on, "just let a piece of paper blow across the road and any horse will nearly jump out of his skin." He felt the atmosphere of James' scowl, and he had a lazy desire to dispel it. The spirit of the day, the fresh morning air, and the fine open beauty of the valley, exhilarated him exceedingly, and he had a careless feeling that it was a pity his companion should be out of tune with it.

What he had seen of James Calvert had not inspired him with any great liking for the man, but Page Emlyn was possessed with a very genial nature and a fondness for mankind in general, which prompted him whenever it was possible, and when it did not require too much exertion on his own part, to smooth out disagreeable situations, and promote, as far as in him lay, the cheerfulness of life.

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His existence so far had been a simple, active one, and he was not particularly overburdened with ideals, yet, almost unguessed by himself, there lay within him this very strong instinct to make life, as far as he had anything to do with it, run in pleasant and easy channels. An instinct which was perhaps nothing deeper than his inborn good manners, yet when one comes to think of it, there is really nothing much deeper than good manners pushed to their logical conclusion.

It was an instinct which gave him a very charming and considerate air, and which made him in his own home city one of the favourites of society.

James, however, was not responsive to his manner.

"I don't stand any foolishness from my horses," he said shortly. "If they get to shying and playing the fool with me, I just lick it out of 'em. A-a-h *you!*" he added, jerking his horse up sharply as the latter pricked his ears at a flock of sparrows in the bushes.

"That's a good-looking animal of yours," Emlyn went on, casting his eyes critically over the roan.

"Good enough," said Calvert, unenthusiastically, and fell back into silence, riding with a set far-away look, and a moody frown between his brow. He liked Page Emlyn even less than Emlyn liked him, and in his present overwrought state of mind, the city man's cheerful air and manner jarred on him exceedingly.

Emlyn glanced at him. Poor James Calvert, he did not meet adversity gracefully, so few of us do — there are as yet no "trained workers" in that line,



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whatever we may come to later on in the growing mania for specialization — and his whole make-up and bearing was unattractive.

"Sulky devil," Emlyn commented inwardly, and again his thoughts gave a little leap of surprise as the picture of Hester Rymal's face rose to his mind, flushed and eager as it had been when she caught sight of James from the car window.

Emlyn was not one, however, to take things very seriously. It was a pity, certainly, that a charming girl like Miss Rymal should appear to be in love with a boor of James Calvert's stamp. And a pity also that Calvert should have nothing better than a black scowl for the splendour of the weather. But after all, why should it trouble him? The feminine side of life had always struck Emlyn as a hazardous venture at its best, but as a certain proportion of humanity still persisted in being women, there seemed in the present scheme of things very little that he could do about it; and Miss Rymal in all probability ran no more risks than the rest of her sisters. As for James Calvert's frown being a blot on the landscape, why certainly the landscape seemed cheerfully able to bear it, so why in Heaven's name should it disturb him? In truth it did not, and presently as they jogged along, their horses' hoofs falling rhythmically, and the saddle leather creaking comfortably in reply, he broke into a contented whistle, a gay tune emitted softly and carelessly from between half-closed lips, as he drew his untroubled breath in and out in easy respirations.

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The world, as he came in contact with it, had as a rule a friendly feeling for Page Emlyn, a feeling which among his friends was carried beyond friendliness into the realms of real affection.

It is always a difficult — frequently an impossible task — to say what makes for popularity in a person. Perhaps in Emlyn's case it was due to his easy and considerate manner, which made him always pleasantly ready to hear what another had to say, even though what he said was frequently not half so well worth hearing as what he himself might have said. He did not, for instance, make many jokes himself, but he never failed to see the point of the other man's joke. Also his simplicity and naturalness was very charming. There was nothing complex or affected in his make-up. His ability — and he was accounted an able man among his friends — had none of the self-conscious, difficult cleverness of some people — a cleverness which sets its unfortunate possessor eternally at odds with his world, one moment making him look upon himself as infinitely superior to those around him, the next as humiliatingly inferior. Emlyn's cleverness lay in the gift, without losing his own personality, of being always in tune with his surroundings. He had a delicate subconscious sense which put him in quick touch with other people's attitudes of mind.

All this made for his popularity, but perhaps most of all, the world's reason for loving Page Emlyn was the old classical reason for the affectionate attitude of

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the lamb toward Mary — Page Emlyn loved the world. He might, also, in his moderately easy circumstances, have found time to combine with his love of the world an added fondness for the flesh and the devil as well. This, however, he had not cultivated. What he loved was the world, life, and his brother man. For the game of life he had a certain high loyalty, and a liking for his fellow players. And so far, save for one great sorrow, he had found the game a pleasant enough one to play.

This sorrow had overhung his early youth.

From the time that Page Emlyn was sixteen, to his twenty-first year, his father had been gradually and remorsefully drinking himself to death; and his mother, who, as long as there was a need for it, had never wavered in her fine spirit of loyalty to him, had quietly died a year after her husband, because, in spite of everything, she had loved him to the very last, with that perfectly unreasonable serenity of devotion that God makes some women capable of. She died apparently worn out by the long struggle, but perhaps, after all, it was not so much that she was tired, as that there was a vague wistful thought in her spirit that Gerald Emlyn still had need of her. Gerald Emlyn, the man who had wrecked her life, but who, nevertheless, up to his last difficult breath, had loved his Dark Beauty of the Eastern Shore with all the passion that his nature was capable of — and strange as it may seem, it was capable of a good deal.

To Page Emlyn his mother had stood always for

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the epitome of what was good and heroic, and beautiful. Her beauty and her unflinching whimsical gaiety had fascinated him like a lover; and her courage and devotion, to which he had been the closest witness, had made his very soul stand still in admiration.

The year after his father's death, when his mother had been left entirely to him, in all the chivalry and devotion of his young manhood he had set himself to make up to her for the past tragic years, and the pity of it lay in the fact that, in spite of all his efforts, in spite of his passion of tenderness, he knew he had not succeeded. All his fine strength and devotion had never made her forget her husband. Olivia Emlyn had been one of those women whose sharpest affection is always called forth by another's weakness. She loved her son very devotedly and relied entirely upon his fine strength and manhood — often with a little laughing surprise, as though finding their positions almost reversed — but the vital part of her nature had belonged to her husband.

After her death Emlyn slammed the door of his soul tight shut upon that episode of his life. That last year, and the years before which had led up to it, had been so keen a tragedy that he could not bear to touch upon it even with his thoughts. Therefore he kept only the remembrance of his mother's gay and lovely personality and put all the rest sternly from him. And after ten years of resolutely keeping his thoughts from tragedy, and of living a careless and easy life in which fate had been kind to him, and to a

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moderate extent had brought him a realization of his ambitions, it had come to be a belief with him that no thumbscrews of circumstance could ever again awake in him such a passion of feeling as his young manhood had been capable of. He reasoned with himself that it was a phase of his youth which he had outgrown, and he was very content that it should be so, for on the whole, it is just as well for the tranquillity of one's life that there should be no seething depths of emotion below the surface of one's reserve.

Emlyn at thirty-two was a young man of moderately handsome appearance, healthy blond colouring, and a pleasant open expression; one who had fallen into an easy jog-trot with the world, in which he met life on friendly terms, but found nothing in his existence to stir the hidden depths of his nature, or to awake within him any of the poetry of his being. Indeed this easy-going attitude gave him more the placid and tolerant air of the man of forty-five, say, rather than the usual alertness of the man of thirty.

"Here, let's get along," said James, impatiently, breaking the silence, and giving his horse a cut. "If we're to get over that tract before noon we can't fool along all day at this rate."

"All right, set your own pace," Emlyn returned cheerfully, as the horses broke into a canter.

George Haymer and the timber inspector behind them followed suit, and the four riders sprang forward at a free swinging pace to the accompaniment of the horses' hoofs, the heave of their breath, the reaching

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rise and fall of their bodies, and the crunch, crunch of the saddle leather. The keen air met their faces exhilaratingly, and put a tingle of life into each man's being, which found an answer in the spirit and animation of the weather.

It was a riotous wind-swept day. A day that for its vivacity and movement might wake any wild devil of recklessness that slept in a man. The wind tore through the parti-coloured trees, and sent their leaves scurrying away in dancing swirls of red and yellow. The cloud shadows fled down the mountains touching them to purple as they passed, and rushed away across the valley like great swooping birds. The mountains themselves, in spite of their autumn flush of colour, were still dark and petulant from the remembered storm of the day before. Sometimes the clouds all blew together and obscured the sun, again the wind swirled them aside, and the sun burst forth in a brilliant dancing surprise which caught the whole landscape in a splendour of shimmering colour. Or again, a single wind-driven ray broke through a silver opening in the clouds and struck here a green sigh of effulgence from a young wheat field, or there warmed a streak of yellow chestnut trees on the mountains to a fold of tawny velvet. The air was damp and free and intoxicating as it came over the hills out of the splendid west, and tore away to the east, young and vigorous and unafraid. It was a wild, a reckless, a tumultuous day, when one kissed both hands to Fate, ready for any riotous gust of life that might chance.

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The riders drew rein at last where the road fords the Swamp Creek, a shallow, insignificant little stream, which for a short distance apes the Droop River in impertinent imitation on the opposite side of the valley, and then, suddenly tired of its mimicry, sweeps, laughing, across to join forces with the river, as though it said, "There, don't mind me, I won't make fun of you any longer — let's you and me run together, we'd make quite a respectable sized stream — the kind they put in geographies — if you flow into me."

The Droop River, however, for all its breadth, is a stream without much sense of humour, and in its endeavour to explain pompously to the Swamp Creek that *it* flows into it, and not *it* into it, it quite loses its temper and breaks into innumerable angry little ripples — for indeed it is a difficult explanation to make with lucidity as any reader may see from the text.

The horses broke their stride and slowed up for the ford, snorting a little from their gallop. The men's faces were reddened by the keen air and their blood was racing through their veins.

"Whoo-ee, fellows! That was a right smart of er little gallop, wa'n't it?" George Haymer cried jovially. He was rather a thick-set mountaineer, but his ruddy face was a cheerful one in spite of a long and somewhat pathetic black beard.

"Now then — now then," he remonstrated tolerantly with his horse — a particularly raw-boned and weedy animal, who essayed an awkward shy at the ford's edge. "Now, then, look at *you*, puttin' on airs,

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an' tryin' to act like you was a thousand-dollar horse, when anybody kin tell jest ter look at you that you ain't worth er cent over eight hundred and fifty."

The horses went into the ford, their hoofs stumbling in muffled sound over the hidden boulders, and dashing the water up in little silver showers of spray which fell back again into the creek in the sharp splash, splash of scattered drops, their noses skimming the water with eager sensitive touch until they came at last to the still reaches, where they could plunge their mouths deep into the cool stream, while the easy current made faint ripples about their nostrils.

The men kicked their feet from the stirrups, and sat relaxed in their saddles, watching the crinkled reflections of themselves in the lazy water, and listening to the sip, sip and swallow of the horses' noisy drinking.

"You ain't specially struck on your horse, is you?" George Haymer remarked with easy loquacity to his nearest neighbour, the timber inspector, a fat, florid man who was somewhat winded by the gallop, and whose discomfort expressed itself in a good-natured protesting scowl, much the expression of an overgrown baby.

"He's got the confoundest, roughest trot I ever struck, an' er mouth to match," he returned, trying to settle his heavy figure more comfortably in the saddle, and resting his scaling rule against his hip.

"Come on! Come on!" James broke in presently



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in irritable tones. "We can't let these brutes drink all day!"

He gathered up his reins impatiently, and the others followed his example, slipping their feet back into the stirrups again, and urging their reluctant horses out of the ford.

"James, they tells me how you've bought that little strip er land that lays acrost the road from Rymal's place," Haymer remarked as they came up the bank of the ford. "It's er right pretty little piece er ground an' lays nice ter ther road."

His remark was an unfortunate one, as the land in question was the same of which James had spoken to Hester in all his happy planning of the night before. The words were a touch upon the very raw, and in the leap of his anger James would have liked to break every bone in the other's garrulous body. With an effort, however, he controlled himself, and answered shortly:

"Yes, I bought it, but I'm going to sell it again. It—" he paused over the words—"it's not worth what I thought it was," he said.

"Goin' ter *sell* it ergin, aire you?" the other exclaimed in surprise. "Well, I'll be doggoned! Why, I ses to myself when I heared you'd bought it, well, I ses, James has been courtin' er right smart while, an' now I reckon he's fixin' ter git married an' go ter house keepin'."

The careless words stung James beyond all self-command and jerking his horse up violently, he wheeled

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upon the other. "Then you can go to the devil, and think something else!" he retorted furiously.

For an instant the two men faced each other, Calvert's face blazing with anger, and Haymer's easy good nature beginning to give way to temper.

"What in all —" he began, but Emlyn cut him short.

"Oh, go to the devil yourself, Calvert," he said laughingly, and at the words James turned hotly upon him.

"Now see here," Emlyn went on quickly, for he saw that for some unaccountable reason James was very angry, and that it was necessary to act at once if a quarrel was to be averted. "Do you want to put this deal through or don't you? If you do, say the word, and we'll get on to the tract; if you don't you can stop now and have your row, but I give you fair warning my company isn't sending me up here to waste time and money over any blasted prize fights." He spoke good-temperedly, and he was certainly trying to prevent a fight between Calvert and Haymer, yet unreasonably enough he would not in that moment have greatly objected to fighting James Calvert himself. All the morning the latter's manner had been overbearing and disagreeable, and his present outburst of anger seemed entirely unprovoked.

"Aw, look a here now, don't you fellows get all balled up in a fight right at the start," the timber inspector threw in pacifically, his face all crumpled up in complaining protest. "That ain't no way to do business," he said.

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"I ain't wantin' ter fight nobody," Haymer protested. "James jest jumped on me fer nothin."

Page Emlyn still looked at Calvert steadily.

"Do you want to wind up this deal, or don't you?" he said.

For a moment longer James hesitated, glaring at all the three; then he turned his horse round and spurred him on without a word, the others following after.

He was very angry, but Emlyn had made perhaps the strongest appeal that was possible to bring him to himself. Business was business with James, and the selling of that particular tract was a consummation for which he had worked long and hard, and the selling of it, he was very well aware, depended upon the report Page Emlyn made of the property to his company.

In a little while the party branched off the main road of the valley and struck into the steep and narrow ascent of the mountain. James rode silently a little way ahead, and the others strung out in an irregular bunch behind.

"What are the calls we have to look up?" Emlyn inquired of George Haymer, turning a little in his saddle to do so. The latter was riding sulkily along, his eyes on the ground. He was a good-natured man on the whole, but once his anger was started, it was that slow temper that broods and broods upon an insult. Emlyn, true to his instinct, sought to divert him by conversation. Moreover, any one in a lower class made always a quick appeal to his fine breeding.

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Haymer reached in his pockets and brought out a folded and rather soiled paper, and letting the reins go loose on his horse's neck, he opened it and read.

"Beginnin' at a white oak marked E-G, bein' a corner of the old Brown survey, North, ten degrees East, eighty-nine poles ter a dogwood and gum on top of ridge. South, sixteen East, ninety-one an' er half poles to three red oaks by branch in ther Sweet Run Holler. South, seventy-six East, fifty-one poles ter er dead pine on low place on ridge." Haymer's careful reading droned on to the very last call, and Emlyn listened politely to the end.

The mountaineer folded the paper at last and restored it to his pocket. The gloom of his face was already lifted somewhat, for the sound of his own voice was an unfailing delight to him.

"It's ther old Morris tract that ther Braxton boys bought two years ergo, an' then busted up on, fore they'd hardly got commenced cuttin' on it."

"Why, what's the matter with it? Isn't the timber there?" Emlyn inquired.

"Oh, ther timber's there all right," Haymer returned, "but they was jest out fer theyselves, an' hadn't no capital behind 'em. An' I allers do say if yer havn't got ther money an' want ter bust up, buy er sawmill, an' if yer want ter bust up damned quick, buy two. Moreover, they was so all-fired stingy they had ter try an' rake in ther tan bark an' ties as well, an' tan bark an' ties is er proposition that 'ud jest natu'ally ruin er Vanderbilt."

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"Oh, I ain't so sure of that," the timber inspector put in, "tan bark ain't so bad if you know how to handle it."

So the three dropped into easy fragmentary conversation as the irregularities of the road and their horses' pace gave them opportunity. Soon, however, they struck off even that narrow way and the real business of the morning began. It was hard work. The paths they were forced to take were difficult and indistinct, and sometimes lost themselves altogether in the undergrowth, or again there were no paths, and abandoning their horses they had to force their way up and down steep ridges, and along thickly overgrown hollows on foot. The fat timber inspector puffed and groaned and toiled behind, in keen discomfort. He did not enjoy it, and neither was James Calvert's mood one to permit of much pleasure in the business, but Page Emlyn was intoxicated with the beauty of the woods and the fine crisp day, and he and George Haymer struck up a cheerful friendship. Haymer seemed indeed to have recovered entirely his good temper, and constantly encouraged the others with a promise of a drink of the best whiskey a man ever swallowed when they came to his house where they were to get dinner. "Yes, sir, jest the very finest lick'er er feller ever let run down his th'roat."

It was hard work and more or less tedious, for the calls were often difficult to find; the E. G. tree, for instance, succeeded in eluding them for some time, but at last, late in the morning, they came to the end of

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the tract, after a thorough and satisfactory inspection. The timber was certainly there, and now it merely remained for James Calvert and Page Emlyn to come to an agreement on the behalf of their respective clients, and then the sale of the Sweet Run tract would be completed. And in a little while thereafter the great ugly sawmill would be brought laboriously into the hollow to send up its plume of white steam in the clear early morning air, and to eat its rapacious way slowly up hollow after hollow, the tram roads delivering the unfortunate trees to its terrible whirling teeth, which would rip the screaming planks from the logs, feeding horribly the while upon their very sawdust. Where was now a quiet mysterious peace, and the damp sweet fragrance of autumn woods, would be in a little while an ugly energy of work, and the sharp smell of slaughtered trees; and by and by, when Peace again came stealing on tip-toe back into the ravished hollows, she would find brown and sodden piles of sawdust, broken tramways, stumps and limbs of the shattered trees strewn all up and down the mountain sides, disused sheds, and little groups of slab shacks, their blank eyes, denuded of glass, staring emptily into the wilderness; all settling slowly into decay, and all summed up in the simple mountain phrase — "Here's where one er ther Rich Creek Company's sawmills set er while back."

"Yes, sirs, it's er right pretty stretch er timber, an' ain't been really cut over in years," George Haymer remarked. They had come back to his sombre little

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cabin for a late two-o'clock dinner, and now, the meal over, they had gone out to sit for a time on his small and rickety porch.

"I recollect, though," he went on, "there was er mill set up in there when I was er boy. They fetched ther logs down the Sweet Run Holler by splash dams, but reckon the Rich Creek Company'll run er tram road up it this time."

James Calvert made a move as though to rise from his chair. He was satisfied that the deal was virtually settled, and though he was pleased with the day's work, the goad of his unhappiness made him restless and anxious to be in motion.

"Well, let's be getting under way," he said.

"Oh, pshaw! What's your hurry — let's take a little breathin' spell first," the timber inspector protested. He was exhausted and still somewhat blown by the morning's exertion, and he was thinking longingly of the possibilities of a nap before the ride home.

"Oh, I say, Calvert," Emlyn joined in, "don't be in such a hurry. The horses havn't finished eating yet."

"Yes, set er while," Haymer urged hospitably, "an' we'll hev ernuther little hit at that ole jug — jest ter show no hard feelin's; wait er pair er seconds an' I'll fetch it out," he added, as he rose and went into the house; and overruled by the others James settled rather sulkily back into his chair once more. Emlyn, seated upon the porch steps, lit his pipe contentedly, looking away at the silent mountains, which stooped

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close over the little cabin, as it hung there upon the steep side of one of them. With a good appetite he had enjoyed his dinner, meagre though it had been, and now he was just tired enough to be conscious of a serene tranquillity; the only thing which disturbed him being the question of how he could possibly take another drink of the very rank whiskey which their host had hospitably forced upon them. All the morning Haymer had boasted of the jug awaiting them, and on their arrival he had produced it with triumph. James Calvert had ungraciously and flatly refused. Emlyn and the timber inspector, however, had had one drink and then another, "Jest ter show friendship."

Emlyn was not a drinking man — in fact for the taste of whiskey he had almost a disgust, bred perhaps by his youthful association with it — yet he did not refrain from stimulants altogether. He had a dare-devil pride which made him, knowing his possible inheritance, shun the refuge of total abstinence. He had a sensitive revulsion to the thought of people's saying, "Of course Emlyn's a teetotaler, he doesn't dare be anything else." Dare? Of course he dared be his own master — he would show the devil of appetite that had destroyed the father that it had no dominion over the son.

In a moment Haymer reappeared with his grey-stone jug and a tin cup. "Come on, fallars — come on — who's the first gent ter step up?" he cried jovially, pouring a generous drink into the cup. "Here you



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go, James," he went on, turning to Calvert in a forgiving spirit, "I'll give you first whack," and he held the tin out to him.

James shook his head.

"No, clear out — I don't want any of your poisonous stuff," he said irritably, and he pushed the other's hand sharply away. Some of the whiskey spilled, and Haymer regarded him with an injured surprise.

"Poisonous stuff," he repeated, "why, this is *good* lick, it's Johnson's best brand. Why, I paid three dollars and a half for this very jug." He paused and there was a hurt look in his face, a look which would have been foolish if it had not been pathetic as well. He was doing his utmost as host to offer his guests the finest of its kind that there was to be had. He had produced his whiskey in the proud belief that it was the finest — it was certainly the best he had ever tasted. His thoughts had run on it all the morning and he had boasted incessantly of its merits, and now to be told that his best was poisonous stuff was as though the very foundations of his world were giving way. He turned slowly away from Calvert and looked at Emlyn, the bewildered hurt expression, which was somehow like an animal's, still in his eyes.

"Ain't it good whiskey?" he questioned.

Emlyn's quick understanding made him see in a flash all the sordid pathos of it. Shut away here among the mountains the man's existence was a drearily narrow one, and his imagination matched it.

"Confound Calvert, why can't he at least refuse

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like a gentleman?" he commented angrily to himself.

"It *is* good licker, ain't it?" Haymer appealed again, still looking at him and still holding the tin cup in his hand.

Emlyn's sympathy stabbed him sharply.

"Good liquor!" he cried. "Well, you just give *me* another show at it!"

The injured, bewildered look in the mountaineer's eyes went out like a flash, and his face all crumbled up into laughter.

"*You* know good stuff all right!" he cried triumphantly, and handed over the cup.

Emlyn tossed off the liquor with gusto, though he coughed a little in spite of himself, for it was a stiff drink and the whiskey burnt his throat as it went down.

"That's ther idee!" cried Haymer, delightedly. "Here," he added, turning to the inspector, "you'll have ernother too." His confidence in himself and in his ability to entertain royally was restored by Emlyn's manner.

The inspector accepted the proffered cup appreciatively, though he did so more for the sake of the whiskey than with any idea of sparing his host's feelings.

"I reckon I'll just go in and lay down on the bed for a little spell, if you don't keer," he said, "I feel as though I'd like a little snooze 'fore we start back."

"Help yerself — help yerself," Haymer returned cordially, and accompanied his guest inside to see

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him comfortably disposed of on Mrs. Haymer's best and softest feather bed. Returning to the porch presently he picked up his treasured jug once more and took another deep and satisfying draught therefrom. "A-h-h," he said, drawing his breath with a cough or two and smacking his lips, "I tell yer, boys, that's ther reg'lar ole-time stuff. Licker like that puts ther spunk inter er feller. Why, dogged if I don't b'lieve one drink er this yere would put spirrit 'nough in er rabbit ter make him jest natu'ally spit in er bulldog's eye." He laughed uproariously, and set the jug down. "Yes, siree, jest natu'ally spit in er bulldog's eye," he repeated. Emlyn joined in his mirth somewhat more heartily than the joke warranted.

Haymer settled himself upon the porch steps a trifle unsteadily, and sat for a little while staring away at the mountains. Presently, however, he became aware of James Calvert's silent but contemptuous regard. He rose slowly, pompously, to his feet. He had been generous with his liquor to his guests — with himself he had been more than generous. Unsteadily he poured a fresh supply of whiskey into the cup.

"Now look a here, James Calvert," he said, "you've been er peckin' at me all day, an' I jest want it ter quit right here an' now. You'll take er drink er my whiskey ter show good feelin's er I'll know ther reason why." With the words he held the cup out toward the other.

James Calvert rose slowly to his feet. His anger was gathering itself.

"I'll see you in hell before I'll touch any of the

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damned stuff!" he cried, and struck the other's hand violently aside.

The cup fell to the floor with a splash of the brown liquor and moist clang of the tin.

For a moment Haymer stood looking stupidly at him, then a dull red flush swept up to his forehead.

"*Damn* you! James Calvert!" he cried, and leaped upon him furiously.

James was strong and he was sober. He threw the mountaineer off and back on the porch floor very easily.

Emlyn stumbled to his feet and got between the two. "Get out of this!" he cried angrily to James. "Can't you see the fellow's drunk!" He was surprised at the difficulty he experienced in enunciating his own words.

James looked at him scornfully.

"Yes, he's drunk — and so are you," he retorted, and with an insolent shrug of his shoulders he turned his back on Emlyn, and stepping off the porch pulled his hat with a jerk down over his eyes, and swung off into the woods, following a little path that cut its way in and out through the undergrowth of the mountain side.

Even in his present irritated state, he was above getting into a fight with men who were intoxicated. He might, it is true, had he been in a different mood, have tried to put a stop to the drinking. But James Calvert would not that day have raised a finger to keep the whole world from drinking itself to perdition.

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Emlyn stood upon the porch swaying a little, and watched him disappear into the woods. He was exceedingly angry with Calvert, yet when he attempted to follow him, he slipped upon the steps and sat down rather heavily. Once there it seemed easier to sit and think about the other than to go after him. Great hulking boor! He'd like to know how anybody ever got the idea that James Calvert was a gentleman! Why, he'd rather associate with a good simple-hearted mountaineer like Haymer any day! The thought of Haymer brought with it quite a glow of affection, and suggested that he had better see how his friend had stood his fall.

The simple-hearted mountaineer was seated on the porch floor rubbing the back of his head with a slow groping hand.

"Now ain't that j'like James Calvert," he complained. "He's too stuck-up to drink with er man what's poor." His words were thick and difficult to understand, and his tone was very pathetic.

"Poor fellow, he really is very drunk," Emlyn commented to himself.

"An' James's jest been er peckin' at me all day — jes' all day," Haymer took up his lament. "An' I'd like know whatever I done er said set him 'gin me like that. I dunno why he'd mind er fellow sayin' he was goin' ter git married, but he commenced ter jump me jes' ther minit I said er word erbout it." Again he felt the back of his head vaguely.

Emlyn sat upon the steps and regarded him with an

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affectionate, dreamy pity; indeed everything seemed to be drifting rather far away.

"An' I dunno what's so stuck-up 'bout," Haymer went on, slowly and painfully searching into the past. "Ole man Calvert an' m' father use go huntin' all time together — yessir, jes' all time together. An' now James won't even drink with me cause s'I'm poor man. Why m' paw an' ole man Calvert use go *rabbit* huntin' 'n' *fox* huntin' 'n' *deer* huntin' together — why," he cried as an evidence of the climax of good fellowship, "him an' my ole man onct they run up 'ginst er whole nest er *pole-cats* t'gether. An' af'wards ole man Calvert ses to my paw, 'Damn it, Joe,'h' ses, 'reckon you 'n' me'll have t' be satisfied with jes' our own selves fer company fer right smart little spell.'" Haymer paused a moment thoughtfully. "An' it was the truth, they jes' had to be," he added dreamily. He spoke naturally with a lingering drawl, but now that he was drunk his words dragged themselves out endlessly.

"Yes," he said again, "they jes' had to be satisfied with their own selves f' company."

He got up slowly and with some difficulty, aided with almost equal difficulty by Emlyn, and laid his hands with elaborate gravity upon the other's arm. "Mus' go tend t' James," he said, solemnly confidential, "he's stuck-up young fellow, needs lickin'"; he held on to Emlyn, and they both swayed slightly to maintain their balance.

Mrs. Haymer had come quietly out on to the porch, and removed the jug unseen by her husband. After-

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wards she called together all her brood of staring children and drove them before her into the kitchen, shutting the door firmly after her. She was a mountain woman, however, with a certain fatalistic attitude toward life, and the removal of the jug and the bang of the kitchen door were the only protests entered by her against her husband's behaviour.

"Goter find James — teach him give me that kind talk," Haymer continued. "C'm'on, Buddy," he added, "yer friend 'f mine, James sha'n't tetch you." Emlyn felt a keen resentment against the imputation that he needed protection against James, but when he attempted to voice his indignation, he found the words so elusive and so difficult of pronunciation that it seemed more discreet to remain silent.

For the first time in his life he was drunk — exceedingly drunk, but though his balance was unsteady his manners were very dignified. He was, however, beginning to be possessed with the other's desire to find and chastise James Calvert. Slowly he and Haymer went down the porch steps and started along the path leading into the woods which James had taken. It seemed a very rough path, and they found, by walking with their arms about each other's waists, they got along more easily. A short distance from the house a small stream came down out of the mountain, and paused to take breath in the little half hollow where George Haymer's cabin stood; then, rested and refreshed, it went riotously on its way again. Along its edges where it paused the ducks had made their

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toilet earlier in the day, and left their white feathers all about to blow in the wind and sunshine. It was not a particularly tidy little stream with the scattered duck feathers and the soft mud, and also the remains of an old clothes basket had been left there to rot slowly away. The stepping-stones by which the path crossed to the other side, as viewed from the bank by Haymer and Emlyn, presented a very difficult problem. Haymer, however, still retained his feeling of responsibility as host. He disentangled himself with affectionate care from Emlyn's embrace. "You jes' wait here, Buddy, 'n' I'll go over 'n' help you 'crost all right," he said reassuringly.

Alas, his intentions were of the very best, but his accomplishment was hardly equal to them. His foot slipped from the first stone he essayed, and with a swoop and spread-eagle splash he went down helplessly into the brook, landing in a half-sitting posture in the middle of the old basket.

Emlyn regarded him with solicitude. "Poor old man!" he cried. "D'hurt self?"

Haymer tried to rise, but the basket with its broken fibres held him with a placid firmness, and he sank back again with a bland resignation. Looking up at the sky he smiled softly. "I'm little Moses," he said. "Little Moses in bulrushes." His expression was infantile.

It scarcely seemed to Emlyn that he could really be little Moses. "You're fool," he said calmly, without heat, merely stating a fact.



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Haymer did not resent the epithet, yet he did not on the other hand accept it. "No," he said. "No, s'not so. I'm not fool, I'm lit'le Moses, and lit'le Moses wa'n't fool."

The argument seemed well taken to Emlyn and he paused a moment to think it over. However, he was impatient to find James. "C'm'on," he said, "C'm'on, let's find Calvert."

But Haymer demurred. "Aire y' Pharoh's daughter?" he demanded.

Again Emlyn paused, thinking it over. After due consideration he concluded that he was not. "No," he said, shaking his head.

Much relieved, Haymer settled himself back comfortably into the arms of the kindly basket.

"Musn't go 'ith you," he said. "Lit'le Moses can't go 'ith anybody but Pharoh's daughter — t'wouldn't be scripiter. You find James — jes' y'find James, and giv' him one f'lit'le Moses — jes' giv' his stuckupedness one f'li'tle Moses." He paused. "Giv' him one from George Haymer too," he added with momentary vehemence.

"Right, old man," said Emlyn, heartily, his zeal on fire. He got safely across the brook by the simple process of ignoring the stepping-stones altogether, and proceeded along the path. But though his zeal was intense, his gait was not very steady, and moreover he was beginning to have little spaces of unconsciousness. Life seemed to be going by in a series of pictures, each picture isolated from the other. Once

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he became aware of himself staring up into the very blue autumn sky with its scud of white clouds, while his body reclined in the arms of some young bush. Another time he found himself standing in the pathway waist deep in the kaleidoscope of undergrowth which drifted mistily away from him on either side in waves of colour. The sky seemed stooping upon him in undulations of blue, and the ground was uncertain beneath his feet.

"Mus' find Calvert, stuck-up devil," he told himself firmly, and stumbled on. Again the curtain of unconsciousness shut down upon him, to rise a little later. He was still in the hidden pathway, but James Calvert's figure was a little distance ahead of him; his back was turned, and miles and miles away Emlyn saw the fields of Calvert's Valley, the white houses of Willoughby, and beyond the straight line of the Shadow Mountains. He made a movement toward James and then followed a confused mosaic of impressions; James Calvert's figure before him, the immense blue of the sky, the strident note of a jay in the bushes, the mossy feel of the path under his feet, and the yellow and red tangle of undergrowth all about him. Then the greeny brown look of autumn grasses — the fluttering grey figure of an old woman running — a pair of hands that pushed against a man's back — a bright laughing face lit by dark eyes — and then a cry, sharp, sudden, and terrible. All at once he was aware that he stood upon the brink of a steep cliff with a grey and forlorn old woman beside him. James Calvert had disappeared,

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and in Emlyn's ears was still the remembrance of that sharp surprised cry of fear; also he had a sense that the ground at the top of the cliff had been dislodged, the undergrowth torn apart as something heavy and struggling plunged over.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTO THE SHADOW

A SLOW sense of something awful was dawning upon Emlyn's confused brain. He put his hands uncertainly up to his forehead.

"What's matter?" he said incoherently. "Where'd Calvert go to? What's matter?"

For what appeared to be an age he was conscious of nothing but the stillness of the woods, the bright sun and blue sky, the grey old woman, and beside her a half-grown boy with a queer face, wild dark eyes, and lips that laughed, though the eyes remained sombre and aloof. Then slowly, slowly, it seemed to him as if in a dream, the old woman beside him reached out one thin, callous hand and laid her creeping fingers on his arm. She was panting as though she had been running, and she seemed very much excited.

"Yer needn't ter think yer kin play drunk and fool me," she cried hoarsely. "I was right back there in the bresh — right there close — an' I seed everything — yessir, I jes' seed it all!" she reiterated.

Her clutch dragged upon his arm and her eyes stared close into his face. Emlyn stepped back from her, putting his hands again confusedly up to his fore-

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head. He breathed once or twice in great hoarse gasps like a man rising to the surface after a plunge in cold water. The boy beside him with the aloof dark eyes laughed at his gesture, and put his own arms up to his face, breathing heavily in uncanny imitation of Emlyn, and leering to see if his mother watched him.

Emlyn raised his face at last; his mind was clearing gradually, and a frightful impression was taking hold upon him.

The old woman spoke again. "You've killed him," she cried. "I seed it all."

Emlyn looked at her confusedly, his consciousness groping painfully toward the meaning of her words as though he ploughed through heavy darkness. He did not speak, but his eyes searched her face in horror.

"Yes, sir!" she cried again excitedly, "yer er murderer — er murderer! Yer come up behind him and pushed him right over. I seed yer! I seed yer!" she cried passionately. "Yer jest pushed him right over the cliff."

Her lean brown hands left his arm for a moment and made a sudden gesture — a dramatic picture — as though they pushed against something. The boy beside her laughed and copied the gesture over and over. Emlyn was still confused.

"Where — where is he?" he asked in a dazed voice.

The woman pointed to the edge of the cliffs. Stepping forward, Emlyn peered over, and there, sixty feet below, lying on its face at the foot of the rocks, was

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James Calvert's crumpled body, half in and half out of the shallow water of a little creek.

Again Emlyn put his hand to his forehead; he viewed the scene as a picture having no application to himself.

The old woman laid her eager feverish fingers upon him once more — all her spirit seemed centred in her hands — and turning him round she gave him a push in the direction of the path along which he had come.

"Go an' git help—git the Haymer folks!" she cried. "Go git somebody quick — quick — I'm goin' down *there!*"

Emlyn was still too dazed to do anything but obey, and turning he stumbled and ran back along the path. His mind was as yet only capable of one idea — that he must tell the Haymers that James Calvert was dead. At the back of his confused brain another thought — a terrible one — was feeling its way toward the light. Hurrying and stumbling he ran back toward George Haymer's cabin. Just across the little stream he found Mrs. Haymer and the timber inspector trying to arouse Haymer sufficiently to go to the house, the children looking on as eager spectators. Emlyn burst upon the little group wildly.

"He's dead!" he cried. "He's dead! He — he fell over the cliffs down to the bottom — down into the creek! Help—help—you've *got* to come and help us!"

His words were stumbling and distracted, and ran themselves together in the hurry of fear.

## INTO THE SHADOW

"Who's dead? What aire ye talkin' about — who — *who?*" cried Mrs. Haymer, laying hands on him and shaking him vehemently.

"Calvert — James Calvert! He's at the foot of the cliffs!" Emlyn answered incoherently. "Come on — come on!" he cried, and started to run back along the path.

Mrs. Haymer and the timber inspector ran with him, the children with their bare sun-bleached heads following pantingly behind. In and out through the bright-coloured bushes they all ran one after another, appearing to view here and disappearing there — the pound and crash of the grown-up people's feet, the almost noiseless patter of the children's and the panting breath of all bearing them company.

And so at last they came to the brow of the silent cliff and looked over. The sunlight had stolen away from the shut-in ravine below, and there in its cold shadow they looked down upon the body. Beside it were the old woman and the half-grown boy — a sombre and tragic group, unrelieved by any hint of colour.

Looking up, the old woman shouted and waved to them to come down.

"This way — this way!" cried Mrs. Haymer, running to the side of the cliff where a tiny uncertain path zig-zagged precariously to the creek.

She started down first, the timber inspector close behind her, and the children straggling after. For a moment Emlyn paused upon the brink, then slowly

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he also began the descent. Below them the old woman bent every now and then over the prostrate body, and then, straightening up, waved to them to hurry.

Going down the face of the cliff one after another, the little procession passed from the mellow sunshine above into the shadow of the ravine, the gloom creeping gradually up from their feet to their waist and so to their faces. At a point in the path where the shadow reached only to his knees, and the glorious sun still shone dazzlingly into his eyes, Emlyn paused a moment. The picture of the prostrate body with the old woman and boy beside it was there below him in the gloom. The golden light touched all about him. His nostrils were met by the cool sweet smell of moist woods, the fresh ripple of the little brook came to his ears, and the children's bright dresses as they moved down the cliffs made spots of colour. Uncertainly he put out his hand and clutched a little sapling that grew near by, pressing hard against its rough bark. He felt, he saw, he heard — all his senses were keenly alert as usual, yet still his mind refused to take in the full significance of the picture below him. Then suddenly with a great sickening leap of his heart, his brain cleared and seized upon the meaning of the old woman's words.

"Great God in Heaven!" his soul cried deep within him, and his hands clung desperately to the little shaken sapling. For a long moment he stood in the paralysis of horror. Then slowly he straightened himself up, and letting go of his support he tottered on down the



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path. And gradually the dark cold shadow of the ravine came up to meet him. It crept from his knees to his waist, to his chest, to his shoulders — and at last, chill and sombre, it closed silently above his head.

The huddled body of James Calvert lay upon the edge of a little creek, half in the water and half out, very limp and appealing. The head thrown back showed the white curve of his neck which had been so strong.

The timber inspector bent over the body and started to draw it out of the water, but desisted irresolutely.

"He's dead," he said. "Yes, sir, just as dead as a nit."

He straightened up slowly. He was horror-struck, but his round babyish face had no further stock of expressions with which to meet the occasion, and he greeted this situation with the same perturbed frown of discomfort that the roughness of his horse had wrung from him.

The old woman began a voluble explanation. She stood up little and spare before them, her black-slatted sunbonnet slipping back on her neck, and her grey face with its colourless eyes staring at them.

"Me an' Sonny was out gatherin' chestnuts," she began. "Yer know he's jes' like a baby," she appealed, turning to George Haymer's wife. "An' I go out with him sometimes jes' to humer him — an' we was back up on the hill a piece from the cliff, an' — an' I seed *him*," she pointed to the body — "come up along that little path an' go over to the edge of the cliffs, an'

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stand there fer er spell. An' then all ter onct — I reckon the ground must er give way under him, for I heard him give a gret holler, an' I looked an' he was gone. An' me an' Sonny we run to the cliff an' looked over, an' there he was laying down here."

A great shock of relief leaped in Emlyn's heart and flooded all his pulses with happiness. But almost instantly he became aware of the old woman's colourless gaze fixed menacingly upon him, and all his tumult of rejoicing chilled suddenly.

"An' then," she went on, "*this* fellow," she nodded at Emlyn, "come along an' I sent him back to tell you all."

Her voice was terrible and strained, as though she only held it steady by a fierce resolve, and every now and then it trembled over certain words.

She stood looking down at poor James Calvert a moment in silence, then she stooped impulsively and took one of his limp hands between her own trembling ones.

"Poor feller," she said, gently stroking his arm. "Poor feller, poor feller," she murmured again, her voice breaking into dry horrified weeping. "I reckon yer mammy must er thought er heap of yer," she said between low sobs.

The idiot boy laughed foolishly, doubling himself up and squeezing his hands between his knees.

George Haymer's wife turned away. "It's er terrible thing," she said, "but I got ter go back and see nothin' don't happen ter George, drunk as he is. Come on

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out er this!" she added sharply to the children. "Yer better go on over ter the Patterson folks and git them ter help yer git the body up out er here," she continued. "They live jes' a little piece up the holler from us."

The timber inspector turned eagerly to Emlyn; he was glad of an excuse to get away for a time from the tragic place.

"You'll stay?" he questioned. "I'll be back just as soon as ever I can."

For a moment Emlyn hesitated, then he nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I'll stay."

The old woman watched the timber inspector and Mrs. Haymer going heavily up the cliffs, the latter picking her way and driving the children before her, who turned with many a curious and horrified backward glance; and the moment they were out of ear shot she spoke, with fierce intensity.

"Yer needn't ter think 'cause I lied ter them that I didn't see what yer done," she cried. "I seed yer all right, an' I know who killed James Calvert — an' don't yer fergit it! I don't know who yer aire, nor where yer come from, but my name's Maria Crocroft, an' I live right back here in the mountains, an' I know who killed that Calvert fellow. Come on, Sonny," she added abruptly, and turning with the words she and the boy made their way also slowly up the little path and out into the sunshine above.

Emlyn was left alone. It was very still and sombre and quiet down there in the shadow. There was only the trickle of the little creek, the scrape of his feet on

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the gravel when he moved, and every now and then the faint rustle of a red or yellow leaf as it detached itself and fluttered down among the rest.

Up above was warmth and blue sky, and sunshine touching the leaves at the edge of the cliff to a shining colour — up there was light and vivacity — below was death and shadow and a man appalled.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOULS CONVICTED

It was late in the afternoon. Hester, wrapped in a shawl, had stolen out to the porch to sit for a little space on the steps, watching the dusk slip into the valley and gathering what peace and comfort might be hers from the large serenity of out-of-doors.

With her chin in her palms she watched the daylight melting into night; the moon and evening star growing brighter and brighter, and the crimson sunset colours fading to dusk. Softly and softly the mountains and outstretched fields of the valley were enshrouded in the grey whispering mystery of twilight. Twilight which is really the transparent filmy veil woven of the wistful thoughts lonely people have given birth to all day long, and which God takes and puts away in His own heart just before the night swoops upon them. The night is for tragedy, the dawn for glorious young love, and the day for achievement; but the evening, the remote, the elusive evening, is for the yearning desolate people of the world. The people who have had no great sorrows, and no great joys, but whose tragedy is that life has stepped aside from them. God takes their lonely thoughts for His very,

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very own. They are not life and hope, they are not keen-edged tragedy, they are just God's — for surely He alone knows the reason for so much wistful desolation.

The touch of the evening was upon Hester and she felt in answer to its melancholy.

Something which was a great, almost an essential part of her being had died suddenly within her. Last night and the night before she had wept for the calamity of it. Now the first poignancy of the realization was over, and she was facing what was almost harder to bear — the dreary every-day stretches of a dead emotion, and the difficult picking up of life again under a changed outlook. That place in her heart which had been tenanted by her love and by tender dreams of the future was all at once become a cold desolate waste.

As she sat there upon the steps, and watched the little lights of the village wink into being, and listened to the soft evening sounds of labour which came up from the stable, she experienced a dreary feeling as though her whole being had lost its spring and buoyancy. Sitting thus she became suddenly aware that her father had entered the little gate at the foot of the yard and was coming hurriedly up the path toward her. There was haste and disaster in his gait, and Hester's heart gave a bound of fear. At the foot of the steps he paused, spreading out his hands involuntarily as though to protect her from some catastrophe.

"O Hester, my poor little child!" he cried.

Hester sprang to her feet.

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"*Father! What!*" she answered breathlessly.

For a moment he paused gathering his voice, and Hester clung to his arm and waited. Then he spoke.

"Poor James Calvert has been killed," he said.

"Dead!" cried Hester. "Oh, not *dead*, father!"

Her father put his arm gently about her.

"He slipped over the Raven Rocks and was killed this afternoon — he died at once," he said, holding her very tight.

For a moment Hester clung to him convulsively, then she gave way to a passion of weeping.

"Oh, poor boy! My poor, poor boy!" she sobbed over and over, even as she had said looking forth upon him early in the morning of that same day.

Her father held her in a close embrace of tenderness and sympathy. Hester became presently aware of his pity, and suddenly she realized why he was so sharply sorry for her.

"O father," she said drawing herself away from him, "I must tell you — you mustn't think *that* — you — you were right. Oh, the poor boy! I found I didn't really love him after all. I had to tell him so last night! And *now* — now he's dead!"

"O Hester! Thank God!" cried the Judge. "I hoped you would not — poor fellow, he was not the man for —"

"Oh don't *now*, father!" Hester cried sharply.

For a moment longer she clung to him, steadying herself, then she let go and stood up determinedly.

"I must go to them," she said. "Oh, I *must*! Poor

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Mrs. Calvert — poor, poor little Dolly! Perhaps, oh, *perhaps* there is something I can do for them!”

“O Hester! Hester! Put your arms around me — tight — *tight*. Oh, you cared for him too, didn't you? Oh, isn't it horrible — dreadful? O God, *why* did it happen? Oh, why — why? He was good and splendid and brave, and we all needed him so!”

Poor little Dolly Calvert clung to Hester hysterically in a passion of uncontrolled grief. James had always been very kind to his little sister, and in her estimation he had stood for all that was good and great.

They were in the dining-room of the Calverts' house — a big old-fashioned wainscoted room, which was used as well for a sitting-room.

Dolly loved Hester with that peculiar devotion that a younger girl sometimes bestows upon an older. She had heard the latter's low voice in the hallway, and had fled wildly down to her. The house was filled with horror and with hurrying eager neighbours and Hester had caught Dolly in her arms and had drawn her into the seclusion of the dining-room.

“Poor darling, poor little darling!” she whispered, drawing the little shaking thing down onto a big sofa, and gathering her into the steady tenderness of her embrace. The slender little body shook all over and fluttered and beat like a frightened bird.

“Poor little darling! Poor little sweetheart!” Hester whispered tenderly.

She pressed the other's head close against her shoul-



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der, bending down and kissing her softly. Dolly's wild arms about her neck almost choked her.

"O Hester!" she sobbed. "Isn't it awful — isn't it awful — right over the cliffs —" she shuddered. "Oh, keep me from thinking about it — *don't* let me think about it — hold me tight — *tight!* Oh, you loved him too, didn't you? You were going to be married, weren't you? O Hester, you *did* care for him too, didn't you?"

Dolly raised her pathetic distracted eyes to Hester's face.

"You *did* love him, didn't you Hester?" she begged.

For one wild moment Hester was silent, yet what could she say with those half-distracted eyes fixed upon her face?

"Of course I loved him — of course," she said, and in spite of herself her voice broke with the tragedy of it all. For a moment she caught her breath in convulsive sobs, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. She was crying because she had not loved poor James Calvert, but Dolly thought she cried because she had.

"Oh, poor Hester, poor Hester! Oh, it is awful for you too," she whispered between her own sobs.

She laid her head back presently on Hester's shoulder, and for a little while she was still, soothed somewhat by the other's touch and her soft whispered words.

At last she straightened up. "I must go back to mother," she said distractedly. "O Hester, you are brave — so brave and splendid — I will be brave too,"

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she caught her breath in a little sob, "I will *try* to be brave," she said.

The poor little grief-stricken thing kissed Hester once more and then went blindly out of the room.

Hester rose too, and going over to the hearth where a low fire burnt stood leaning her arms on the mantel-piece and looking down at it. She was overwhelmed to weariness by the grief of it all. It was all terrible, awful — awful that she should have thought she loved James Calvert when she did not; awful that she should have accepted his love just to fling it away, and then most awful of all his death to cap the climax of tragedy. She put her hands drearily up to her face, and as she did so she became aware that there was a stir behind her in the room. Turning she saw the figure of a man standing in the gloom and obscurity of the shadows — for the room was lighted only by the light from the low fire upon the hearth. Slowly the man came forward until the wavering circle of the firelight leaped out to meet him. It was Page Emlyn. He looked at Hester a moment strangely in the semi-darkness, then he spoke.

"I was trying to find the kitchen," he said. His voice was quiet, but it seemed tense and aloof. "They wanted some hot water — or something — I went to get it — I thought that door led to it," he pointed to a door leading into a large closet. "I saw it did not and I started to come out just as you came in — but then of course I couldn't — you understand?" he questioned.

He stood there in the half light looking at her with

## SOULS CONVICTED

a seeming quiet, though there was a wrung intensity about him — yet there was, as well, a certain terrible dignity — the dignity of a man who has been snatched beyond the pettiness of self by some awful calamity. Hester saw he was trying to explain his presence, and she guessed that he had overheard what she had told Dolly.

“I understand,” she said, “of course I understand.” She turned back to the fire with a little weary gesture. “But what does it matter *now* anyway?” she said.

The firelight played over her tall figure, and Emlyn stood in the aloof gloom and watched her.

She turned back to him presently. “You were with James?” she asked.

He nodded.

“Oh, how did it happen? How *could* it have happened?” she cried.

The light leaped suddenly out toward Emlyn, and she saw his fingers clutch the table wildly for support. He was silent for a moment.

“I — I don’t know,” he said slowly. “He had left us for a little while — an old woman said she saw him standing on the edge of the cliffs, and then suddenly the ground under him gave way. The cliffs are very high there —” He broke off abruptly.

“They call them the Raven Rocks,” Hester said mechanically.

Suddenly she shuddered, and turning from the fire reached blindly for a chair. Emlyn came hastily forward and drawing up one placed her in it. The room

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was very strange in its flickering uncertain light, and seemed to be lost in the same black intensity that had engulfed the whole house.

Hester stretched her hands out toward the fire. She was trembling all over in nervous tremours. Her throat was tight and her voice wavered up and down when she spoke.

"I am so, so cold," she faltered with an effort.

He turned quickly to the fire and stirred it into a brighter blaze, and catching up a shawl which lay on the sofa he warmed it and placed it about her shoulders. It was Mrs. Calvert's grey and lavender shawl. Time and again Hester had seen her wear it, and as its soft woollen touch enfolded her now she had a sudden sense that in the face of her disloyalty to James, she had no right to accept its comforting warmth. Her hands were cold and shaking, and she tried ineffectually to chafe them together. Emyln took them quietly in his and rubbed the iciness away. He seemed to be doing for her at every turn, yet he did not speak except to say once — "I am so sorry — so sorry."

The words were trite enough, yet they seemed to convey all that it is possible for lonely mankind to offer of sympathy one to another, and there was too about them a note of sharp remorse.

Hester's trembling ceased presently, and she lay back in her chair, staring into the fire, the whole black tragedy pressing overwhelmingly upon her.

Poor James Calvert was dead — dead! And just the evening before — just such a short time ago she

## SOULS CONVICTED

had sent him away broken-hearted. It seemed to Hester that had she cared for him it would have been easier to bear.

The door was pushed open presently by uncertain hands, and Miss Eliza Phillibrown peered into the gloom.

"Is Hester Rymal here?" she asked in a fluttering voice.

The house was filled with horror-struck and sympathizing neighbours, and she had come with the rest.

"O Hester, is that you?" she added, catching sight of the girl. "Oh, will you go up to poor little Dolly? She's just all to pieces again, and we can't any of us do anything with her, but she asked for you."

"Of course — of course," cried Hester, starting hastily up, and tossing off Mrs. Calvert's shawl, she went quickly out of the room.

Miss Eliza came over to the fire and held out her little bird-like hands toward it. "Oh, isn't it awful — isn't it fearful?" she said, looking at Page. "It's *the* most awful thing I ever knew! Poor Mrs. Calvert! James was just everything to her — and he was such a good young man too. It just breaks my heart to think of them all — and poor little Hester —" She broke off, not completing her sentence.

"Well, I suppose it's the Lord's will — that's just all we can say about it — hem-m —," she said, beginning as it were at another point. "You were out there with him when it happened, weren't you?" she went on, peering at Emlyn. "Oh, how *did* it happen?"

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Emlyn did not answer immediately. Miss Phillibrown looked at him. "Poor fellow," she commented to herself, "I reckon it was a terrible thing for him."

"I don't know," he said at length, "I have — I didn't actually see it — he was standing on the edge of the cliffs and suddenly the ground gave way under him — an old woman told us — she saw it all," he spoke mechanically, telling it over in almost the same words he had used to Hester.

For a little longer Miss Eliza looked into the fire. Then she turned to the door.

"Well, it's the most awful thing I ever knew," she said, "but I must tell the cook to make a cup of tea, and see if poor Mrs. Calvert won't take that — I often find I can take tea when I can't swallow a thing else, when I have one of my headaches, you know," she said, turning to Emlyn for corroboration.

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "Yes, tea is a very good thing."

"Yes," Miss Phillibrown assented. "Yes — but you must be sure the water is boiling, hem-m-m."

Left alone in the room Emlyn slowly relaxed his tense grasp of the mantelpiece and, going over, sank into the chair Hester had vacated. He put his head in his hands. Would people forever keep coming out of the gloom and asking him how it had happened?

"O my God!" he groaned.

Yet the sharpness of the day's tragedy was not yet over for him.

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Again the door opened and a woman came in. Emlyn rose to his feet.

"I am Mrs. Crozier," she said simply. "Are you Mr. Emlyn?"

There was soothing and quiet and strength in her voice and in her large personality.

"I was looking for you," she went on, "Mrs. Calvert wants to see you."

"Mrs. Calvert!" cried Emlyn, sharply. "Oh," he protested blindly, "I can't see *her*!"

Mrs. Crozier went over and laid her quiet hand upon his arm.

"It has been terrible for you," she said. "A terrible shock, but think what it is for her. We must all do what we can for her, you know." Her soothing voice and touch steadied Emlyn. "We must all do what we can," she said again.

At her words something stronger than himself rose within the man and swept him beyond even the overwhelming horror by which he was faced. A white flash of intuition came to him. Whatever his own horror and terrible grip of remorse, he must not let it cripple his helpfulness to others. Here was something that he could *do*.

He drew himself up. "You are right," he said quietly. "I will go, of course."

Emlyn came into Mrs. Calvert's presence. At the door of the room Mrs. Crozier had left him to enter alone.

It was James Calvert's room. They had brought

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him there and laid him on his own bed, and his mother stood beside him. They had not for the present been able to persuade her to leave him.

Ann Calvert was a tall woman, spare and faded. She had been rounded and blond when Eustace Junior had wooed and married her over in Princess Anne County. Her face was grey and tense now, and worst of all there was no trace of tears upon it. She looked at Emlyn when he entered, and for a moment she did not speak. Emlyn was silent also. In the cold tragedy of the room there was nothing that he could say.

At last she began.

"You were with my son out in the mountains?" she said.

Emlyn bowed his head in assent.

"I do not want to know anything about it — don't tell me anything," she said with a gesture of horror. "Only this —" she paused, "only this I *must* know." Again she paused and Emlyn waited. He saw her swallow hard and the muscles of her throat run up and down.

"Was my son drunk?" she said.

Her voice was very calm and dead, and she looked at him across James Calvert's body.

A great rush of pity leaped chokingly in Emlyn's heart. Involuntarily he stepped nearer to her.

"Madam," he said, "your son was perfectly, absolutely sober."

Mrs. Calvert drew a long breath that shook her all over. Slowly she raised her tense hands and buried



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her face in them, and the loose sleeve of her dress fell away as she did so, showing her spare wrists.

"Thank you," she said at length. "That is all," she added.

She turned away from Emlyn and sank down upon her knees by the bed, putting her arm across James Calvert's body, and her face on the pillow by his.

"My son! My son!" she whispered. In her voice was a great triumph and relief. Behold one Calvert — the one over whom she had watched and prayed — upon whom the Calvert inheritance had not fallen.

## CHAPTER IX

### NIGHT AND CHAOS

IN the dark of the early morning Page Emlyn thrashed restlessly from side to side in his hard and narrow bed in the drearily bare little room of the Sheehan House — Willoughby's one hotel. The dreariness and bareness of the room were blotted out now by the black obscurity of the night. He could not see the watery mirror, the ugly wood bureau and washstand, the uncompromising couple of chairs, and the very hideous coloured prints over the mantel shelf. Only the faint musty smell, mingled with a whiff of straw matting, told the nature of the room.

But if the gloom was kind in obscuring his sordid surroundings, its very obscurity and seclusion uncovered a far more awful thing. Most of us have in the dark of our minds some inmost torture which only the black creeping fingers of night can probe out and drag relentlessly into the foreground of thought. Most of us have, I say, a horror of this kind which daylight and the happy occupations of life can obscure, but which when the light fades comes sneaking forth again like some stealthy animal stealing upon its prey. But a worse thing than this was come upon Page Emlyn.

## NIGHT AND CHAOS

He had a horror which was a reality, and which for the last three days had paced softly beside him as well in the clear daylight as in the night season.

It was the early morning of the third day after that afternoon in the gay parti-coloured woods of the Sweet Run Hollow, when James Calvert had gone over the Raven Rocks. Every evening since that time Page Emlyn had gone to bed a murderer in his own sight, and every morning he had arisen re-convicted of guilt — and what the black stretches of the night held for him only God and his own soul, and probably the Devil, knew. By day he was grey-faced, gaunt, and silent, a thousand years older than that debonair Page Emlyn who had ridden out of the valley to the Sweet Run Hollow upon that riotous wind-swept morning, and if any of his home friends had chanced to meet him they would scarcely have recognized him for the easy care-free man of their acquaintance. At night all alone in the dark he fought desperately through the black hours against the train of demons that the night loosed upon him. And the only thing which kept him from going under in the sullen currents of despair was a kind of fierce stubbornness that had suddenly disclosed itself in the depths of his being. A stubbornness that was neither courage nor hope, but was just a mad unyielding devil of inflexibility, rising in savage resistance against being entirely drowned in the floods of utter desperation.

That kept him from insanity at night, and by day he had found a terrible relief in doing every least little

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thing in his power for James Calvert's family. He had been the one to see to things, to plan for them, to help at every turn — indeed the previous night he had been one of the watchers. He had done so much in fact that it had excited some comment throughout the neighbourhood. Only the day before Mrs. Beaks — Josiah Beaks's mother — had come into Mrs. Crozier's after the funeral to talk things over.

"I see," she said, "that young man from Cincinnati is still here. Emlyn, I believe they say his name is — sounds to *me* like a girl's name. You know he was out there when James got killed, and they say he's just done every *thing* for 'em."

"Yes, they say he just couldn't have done more if he'd been Ann Calvert's own son," Miss Phillibrown struck in eagerly. "He seems to be a real kind young man — h'em-m-m," she added.

Mrs. Crozier was knitting silently, her afghan was fuller of incident than she had expected it to be.

"Ye-s," Mrs. Beaks said. "And it's real nice to see anybody inclined that way." She sighed, a long breath emitted between closed teeth, and taking up a fold of her black dress between thumb and forefinger, she examined it critically for a moment.

"I do b'lieve 'pon my soul this dress's beginning to crock already," she said in a brief aside to herself. Then she returned to the real thread of the conversation.

"Yes, as I say," she said, "it's real nice when you see any one acting that way, and yet —" she assumed

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a hesitating air, and then with a sudden frankness, implying that she spoke, she was sure, among friends, she added, "but when I see it, somehow, I can't but feel there's *something* back of it," she dropped her voice slightly, and again she emitted that ominous sibilant breath. She spoke as one who was not to be deceived by any evidences of righteousness.

"Yes," Mrs. Crozier assented, with rather unusual and decided promptness for her, and Mrs. Beaks pricked her ears hopefully. "Yes," said Mrs. Crozier, "I am always quite *sure* there is something back of it — and that something, I believe, is a love and pity for those who are in distress, prompted by the love of God."

Mrs. Crozier did not raise her voice, her tones were clear and concise as always, and she kept steadily on with her knitting.

"Yes," said Miss Phillibrown, with her fluttering eagerness, "Yes — and *I* always think the love of God is such a *very* beautiful thing, h'em-m-m." Miss Eliza could always follow a good lead.

Even Mrs. Beaks was forced to add an assenting grunt; for no matter how much one may have hoped that one's friends would join in a collation of back-biting, when they very firmly decline to partake, the conventions of humanity require a like abstinence on the part of all.

"Well," she went on, "*did* you all notice how bad Hessie Rymal looked? I declare Dolly herself didn't look any worse'n she did — I suppose she and James must have been engaged."

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Mrs. Crozier made no comment upon this, though inwardly she sighed. All things considered, it had not surprised her that Hester should look badly at James Calvert's funeral.

After a momentous and overwhelming event the pulses of one's being seem to stand still for a space, then sooner or later, according to the vitality of the person concerned, they begin slowly and painfully to take up their accustomed beat once more.

It was the third morning since the catastrophe at the Raven Rocks, and Emlyn's pulses were beginning to shake off a little of their paralysis. The morning of the third day — as Emlyn said the words to himself they rang like the words of that great first chapter of the world, "And the evening and the morning were the third day." That had been the story of the creation; the words now seemed to apply to the creation of a grim new world for him. For three days his soul had stood still in the clutch of a great horror. At first there had been terror too — the terror that a sudden hand might be laid upon his shoulder — a sudden voice shout aloud his guilt. But nobody had suspected James Calvert's death of being anything other than an accident. The timber inspector had been soundly asleep at the time. And if George Haymer remembered anything of his and Emlyn's threats concerning James, he had certainly no desire to reveal them; nor, if she knew anything about them, had his wife. And for the world in general the old woman's account of the accident was a sufficiently reasonable explanation.

## NIGHT AND CHAOS

At first for Emlyn there had been this gripping fear of discovery, after the first realization of horror gave him time to think, but that sensation had been swallowed almost immediately in a stronger one — a great overwhelming passion of remorse for the deed, and pity for the stricken family.

How could it have come to pass? How was it possible, even absolutely confused by drink as he had been, for him to do anything so entirely foreign to his nature? Oh, surely, surely, he had cried to himself a thousand times, it was an impossibility! But always the grey old woman's face came back before him accusingly. In vain he tried to send his mind back along that confused path of memory. All that he could recall was that series of faint pictures leading up to old Maria Crocroft's terrible eyes fixed upon him.

This morning of the third day, however, his brain was clearer than it had been, and as he sought frantically through his mind for some solution and escape he came suddenly upon a golden possibility. He caught his breath in the tense astonishment of it for a moment, and then he let go of himself and laughed aloud again and again in sheer relief and happiness.

Blackmail — blackmail! The old woman — the clever old devil — was trying to blackmail him! She had seen that he was drunk, and seizing her opportunity had adroitly made up her story on the spot and fastened it upon him. Emlyn buried his head deep among the pillows and laughed and laughed again. Oh, the clever, clever old devil! Blackmail! Well, the

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woman was mistaken in her man this time. Oh, but the relief and bounding happiness of the idea! He would go that very day as soon as it became light — go to the old woman and pretend to offer her money and so catch her.

He lay still in a complete relaxation of relief and joy.

Without, the dawn began to creep faintly into the valley; in the distance he heard rooster after rooster crowing from the different farms surrounding Willoughby; the fresh morning smell of things was in his nostrils and he heard the sharp whistle of a train, and the swift panting roar of it as it slipped by on the down grade. Outside was life and hope and vivacity, and he belonged to it — he was awaking from a tortured dream — his thoughts had set him free. With a long deep breath of happiness he settled more comfortably into his pillows, and in the relaxing calm of his great relief his whole spirit drifted gradually and peacefully away into the first hours of sound sleep that he had known for three terrible nights.



## CHAPTER X

### THE DARK TOWER

"CHILDE ROLAND to the dark tower came." For some unaccountable reason the words turned themselves over in Page Emlyn's mind, as later, in the dancing light of full morning, he arose and dressed himself for his ride. The dark tower — he laughed. His dark tower had lain back in the mountains not far from the Raven Rocks — a dreary little log cabin tenanted by an idiot boy and a grey and forlorn old woman. But now — now it was no longer to be so. Emboldened by the emancipation of thought which the early dawn had brought him, he would march bravely up to the place, wind his trumpet as it were, and all that horrible overshadowing fear would roll up and blow away, and again in the sunshine and clear light he would be his own glad self once more — Page Emlyn, the more or less successful and easy-going young lawyer of Cincinnati, instead of that terrible haunted Page Emlyn that he had been for the last three days.

He moved about his room quickly and cheerfully, and every now and then as he thought of the old woman's clever ruse he even laughed. He could afford to laugh

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now that he had found her out. And after all, he told himself, he did not much blame her. It must be pretty poor pickings back there in the woods all alone with an idiot son to support. But certainly she was clever — a clever old devil, though she had mistaken her man this time. To be sure it was a little strange that she had not as yet approached him. The thought was disquieting, and Emlyn sought to put it away with reassuring excuses. Probably she had meant to come to him to-day; she had guessed he would not leave until after the funeral. Or again, perhaps she had not had quite the courage to carry out the deception which the inspiration of the moment had thrust upon her.

He ate his breakfast that morning with an appetite such as he had not known for days. Afterwards he went to Mrs. Sheehan, his landlady, and requested a lunch to take with him, for the ride was a long one and it was not possible for him to get back to her twelve o'clock dinner.

"Could you give me some lunch?" he said politely. "I've got to take a long ride into the mountains to-day, and I shan't be able to get back to dinner."

She looked at him strangely he thought; in reality she was merely occupied with the question of what she should put up for him to eat.

"I have to go back to those cliffs — the Raven Rocks — I — I lost something up there —" he said confusedly, frightened by her look. "I want to see if I can find it again." He was angry over his own flounder-

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ing. Guiltily aware of himself as he was, it seemed to him that she must suspect something.

Mrs. Sheehan, however, was not a person who got very quickly in touch with other people's attitudes of mind, and she answered now from her own thoughts rather than from any suspicion of his.

"Well, for the goodness' sake," she said, "don't *you* go slipping over them rocks like poor James Calvert — I should think you'd just hate to go anywhere near 'em again. Now what shall I put up for your snack?" she went on consideringly. "Do you keer for ham — and how about a couple of hard-boiled eggs or so?"

"Oh, anything — anything," Emlyn returned. He almost laughed; the words were so natural, so pleasantly every-day and commonplace, they gave him fresh assurance and confidence that all was really well in his world, that the black shadow which overhung him was only a shadow and nothing more. "And please don't put yourself to any trouble about it. I must go down to the livery stable," he added, "and see what they can give me to ride."

Mrs. Sheehan, busy with the preparation of Emlyn's lunch, made her comments upon him to her maid of all work.

"He's as nice and kind a young man as I ever saw — not one *speck* of trouble in all the time he's been here. And he certainly has done a whole heap for Mis' Calvert an' 'em. He's lookin' mighty peaked too, and I reckon poor James gettin' killed like that must of made him

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

feel right bad. Take it how you will, sudden things like that is always sort of upsettin'."

Mounted on his livery stable horse, his luncheon in his pocket, Page Emlyn rode out of Willoughby by way of its main street, past the court-house with its white pillars and its yard filled with yellow and red maple trees whose fallen leaves made a lovely tawny and crimson carpet on the grass; past the pump; past the Calverts' present house; and at last when he had passed Judge Rymal's place, he was out in the open country. The long road stretched before him, the bright fresh air of the morning blew in his face, and the hope of a great deliverance bore him joyful company.

It was three hours later; Emlyn's horse picked its way along a steep little path which led up to Maria Crocroft's small log cabin perched high upon the side of a rather bare mountain, and seemingly kept from slipping into the hollow below by the yard fence about it. Emlyn had had some difficulty in finding the place. His memory of the track was confused, and more than once he had ridden out of his way, to be directed back again by the occasional mountaineer whom he met.

The sun was high in the blue heavens now, and the day was very hot and very still. The mountains lay clear and unshadowed, and the bright rays of the sun wrung gasps of fragrance from the warm earth. A confused elusive medley of perfume — dying leaves, witch-hazel blooms, hot parched mountains, and dry pennyroyal, which later lost itself somewhat, as Emlyn approached the grey and forlorn little cabin, in the all-

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pervading smell of poverty which overhung the desolate little place.

For every phase of life there is its accompanying smell — smells which even alone and unattended by any sight or sound wake sharp pictures of environment. Aromas of ease and luxury, of enjoyment, of beautiful things, and of luxurious people. And then, alas! descending in the scale of life we pass to that other dreary procession of odours, which speaks of dark and dingy rooms, faded and grey personalities, and the bleak scantiness of existence.

The men of old times, perhaps, imagined a terrible reason for the burning of incense to their God. Perhaps they hoped its heavy and all-pervasive perfume arising from the earth in clouds of glory, and stealing reverently heavenward, as it ascended with one breath of praise for the Lord God Almighty, might with its other breath strangle its brother smells, those pathetic evidences of misery and poverty which persisted in crying aloud their wretchedness, and which the incense and the incense-burner have always wrathfully conceived should not be thrust upon the attention of the Creator, carrying with them, as they so often do, the evidence that someone is grinding the face of someone else.

But the Lord of our understanding of these later days is a different person, and if the earth still gives off smells of sin and wretchedness and poverty, shall He not sense them, and shall He not understand?

Page Emlyn raised his eyes to the cabin above him,

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and in spite of the warmth and serenity of the day, a sudden cold expectancy of fear swept over him.

"Childe Roland to the dark tower came."

On the rickety porch of the cabin a little black and white cur, of the variety known in the mountains as a little "fiest dorg," set up a sharp bark as Emlyn dismounted at the yard fence and, hitching his horse there, climbed over the rails. There was no pretence of stile or gate, just a well-worn place in one of the panels, where for years the people coming from or going to the cabin had climbed over the fence, rubbing it smooth and slippery. The dog kept up its frantic protest as Emlyn set foot in the yard, and suddenly from around the corner of the house a head appeared, staring at the intruder. It was the half-grown boy, old Maria Crocroft's idiot son. As Emlyn recognized him a shudder of revulsion went over him. He saw the boy again with his laughing vacant face, one of the group that day in the tragic hollow, standing by and regarding the others, and Emlyn particularly, with his strange aloof eyes.

For a moment the boy stared at him, just his head with its shock of hair and blank dark eyes appearing around the corner of the grey logs, then with a whoop, half laughter, half terror, he fled, and though Emlyn shouted to him he did not return.

Emlyn went up to the porch by way of the narrow beaten path which was hard and dry in the sunlight, and which on either side was bordered by tall dried weeds, with here and there a few dead zinnias and

## THE DARK TOWER

marigolds, still faintly yellow and purple crimson, giving evidence of a dreary attempt at a garden. Emlyn felt a sudden choke in his throat at the forlornness of the place with its poverty and its pathetic dead flowers. He wondered how anyone pressed upon by such an existence could find the spirit even to imagine a garden.

Arrived at the porch, the barking cur slunk sullenly away at a menace from his whip, and Emlyn knocked upon the door and waited.

It was very silent up there on the side of the partially cleared mountain. Below him was a steep little hollow, across from which rose other mountains. Off to the left he knew was George Haymer's cabin, while on the right, though out of sight from where he stood, were those terrible Raven Rocks. And over all was the great silent encompassing sky. Emlyn sighed wearily as he waited. He was engulfed by the enormous bright stillness of the outlook, the remoteness and silence of the place, and frightened by the leer of his own terror. Was God, he asked himself in a flash of thought, over all? Over all the misery and wickedness, and tangled confused unhappiness of the world? Just as the great blue sweep of heaven was over him, over the Raven Rocks, and over the sombre cabin with its old woman, its laughing idiot, and its sneaking cur? And if He was over all, did He care? Did He care for this maelstrom of wretchedness in which the people of His world were caught? It was the old terrible demand — the question mark of existence — which every human being must ask himself at some time or another;

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so old a question that it is always new — always intensely fresh to the questioner. The uncanny clutch of the far-away loneliness held Emlyn in a vivid and unnatural grip. He put his hand fearfully and half blindly up to his forehead. With the gesture there came to him all at once the remembrance of his mother. What the thought of her brought to him he could not definitely put into words, yet always the recollection of her stirred the best and purest that was in him. It was a warm, a reassuring touch of thought which seemed to bring sunlight and a great trust into his very soul — to animate his whole nature with a sense of peace.

He turned and knocked again decisively. And after a moment or so he heard the tread of approaching footsteps within, and presently the handle turned and the door was opened to him.

One hand resting upon the knob, the other upon the frame of the door, the spare figure of old Maria Crocroft faced him out of the gloom within.

Emlyn took off his hat. "Good afternoon," he said.

"Evenin'," she responded simply. She stood regarding him a moment longer, then she flung the door wider open and stepped to one side. "Won't you walk in?" she said.

Turning, she led the way into the room upon which the outside door gave directly. Her whole air was very quiet and her voice was low. There was something remote and tragic about her, but not repellent, and Emlyn regarded her with pity rather than with resent-



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ment. She left the door open and the sunlight fell in a little yellow patch upon the broad uneven boards of the floor. The room was plastered and whitewashed, the walls adorned here and there by fly-specked coloured prints, and smoked in black and yellow streaks near the fireplace. On the hearth — a great wide stone one, with black cavernous mouth and two bricks for andirons — were the ashes and faint remains of a low fire, by which sat a dingy yellow cat, its thin body hunched over upon its paws. The room was bareness itself; a bed was in one corner, spread with a patch-work quilt, a table in another, a low spinning-wheel in a third, and a few scattered chairs were about, the latter worn and hollowed out by much sitting in, one of them cushioned by a piece of sheepskin. On a small wooden table lay a piece of knitting, a half-finished sock made of grey-white wool evidently spun at home. Here and there were patches of rag carpet upon the floor, little islands of confused faint colour amid the surrounding bareness. A door at the back led into a sort of shed-like kitchen, and at one side of the main room rough steps went up to the loft above. On a window ledge a plant of wandering jew in a tin can looked out upon the mountains and made a little spot of green cheerfulness.

Maria Crocroft placed a chair for Emlyn. "Set down," she said briefly.

She herself settled in a chair opposite and waited, her hands — tired, thin hands, but still strong — folded in her lap. She was very quiet and still. She did not

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Suddenly he caught himself up and stopped in the midst of his frantic burst of words. Anger and fear had driven him beyond all self-control. Turning abruptly away from her he paced up and down the small room a time or two, biting his lips and trying to master himself. Truly, if his anger got so beyond him, and he screamed out such hysterical words in his sober senses, what awful thing, after all, might he not have done while he was drunk?

The thought was a conviction in itself. He went back to his chair and sinking down into it put his hands over his face and groaned. He felt like a frantic trapped wild animal, and the sense of his own weakness overwhelmed him.

The woman opposite looked at him a moment, and then the thin corners of her mouth twitched up and down once or twice, and she made a faint gesture of pity with her hard hand, leaning a little forward and still regarding him in silence. At length she spoke.

"Have you got er mother?" she asked abruptly.

Emlyn did not heed her words.

"Have you got er mother?" she persisted, and her voice was softened and changed from what it had been.

Emlyn heard her this time, but he answered mechanically, hardly comprehending the words.

"No," he said; and then in a sudden sharp realization of what it would have been to his mother had she still been alive, he said "No," again, and with a sort of burst he added, "Thank God!"

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The woman drew back in her chair, and again her hands fell together in their waiting attitude.

Presently Emlyn raised his face, and straightening up he made his last fight for freedom. Putting his hand in his pocket he drew out his purse. "I know you want money," he said, "now how much?" Oh, if she would only take it — if he could only see a leap of gratified avarice in her eyes!

She looked at him a moment in silence and in evident surprise, then a slow vivid scorn began to grow in her face.

"Money?" she cried. "*I* don't want yer money — not er cent of it — not er cent of yer dirty money!"

She looked at him angrily and wildly.

"I reckon yer got money enough to buy me and my poor little ole house an' place an' my afflicted boy, er hundred times over —" she cried, "but I don't want yer money — I don't want er cent of it! Oh, it wa'n't *money* I ever wanted," she said with a sudden vividness. "I was willin' to work — I expected to work — I'd done it all my life, an' I was glad an' willin' to go on doin' it — oh no, it wa'n't *money* I ever wanted!" She paused; the calm and aloofness of her manner were gone, and though her eyes were tearless, her voice was full of emotion.

Emlyn looked at her curiously; even in his own misery he was struck by hers. Moreover her words gave him something to catch hold upon.

"What do you want then?" he said eagerly. "What do you want if it isn't money?"

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She put her hand up to her face in a dazed way, pressing her fingers against her twitching mouth.

"I don't know why I said that," she said in a bewildered tone. "I don't want nothin' — nothin' that *you* kin give me! No, I don't want money — I could er worked — God knows I could er worked — but He wouldn't let me keep 'em — He took 'em all away." She dropped her hands to her lap and began picking unseeingly at an imperfection in the coarse gingham of her apron, her eyes downcast upon it.

In spite of himself Emlyn was drawn out of his own tragedy by the presence of this other.

"What was taken from you?" he asked. The woman stared at him a moment in silence, then she spoke.

"My husband went first," she said. "He took up with another woman. And then my children, my three little babies — they all died inside of two weeks." She paused. "They was the prettiest little children I ever did see," she said. "God never give me but one child to grow up, and him —" she raised her eyes and looked out of doors — "and him like *that*," she said bitterly.

Emlyn followed her gaze to where in the sharp bright sunlight of the yard the half-witted boy, with the eager cur beside him, stood and held a coloured autumn leaf up against the blue of the sky, laughing as the breeze fluttered it in his fingers.

"God never give me but one child to grow up — and him an idiot," Maria Crocroft repeated. She brought her gaze back to Emlyn's face again, and it

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flashed upon him that the tragedy of the weary eyes stood for cheated motherhood. For a moment longer she looked at him, and then her gaze fell once more to her hands lying still in her lap. She did not weep, she had gone along the road of tragedy to a place that was beyond the first few milestones marked by tears.

Emlyn was silent too for a time, he was held in the strange awfulness of it all. It seemed very curious that he the city man should be sitting up there in that silent little cabin on the far-away mountain side in company with this woman. And strange too that they should share a fellowship of tragedy in this shut-away place. He felt as though they were not only alone on the mountain, but were alone as well in the vortex of existence. As though the strong happy streams of life swept by them on either side, leaving them in a whirlpool of calamity. He spoke at last.

"But you said — you said a piece of the ground broke under him," he persisted almost piteously.

"Yes, that's what I said," she answered, "but I reckon the ground wouldn't have broke under him if he hadn't er been shoved."

Emlyn felt a sick nausea of horror go over him, and again he clutched his hat tight. Yet it seemed to him he must know it all — he must for once see the picture of himself the murderer.

"Tell me all about it," he said.

The woman raised her hand as though in protest, but he answered quickly in the same words.

"Tell me about it — tell me *all* about it."

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The other's gaze, which had met his fairly enough until now, shifted, and she looked out at the mountains for a little while, then she began.

"I was out huntin' chestnuts with Sonny, jest a little piece back up in the bresh from the Raven Rocks. and d'rectly I seed him —"

"Saw whom?" asked Emlyn.

"*Him*," she answered, "that Calvert feller. I seed him come along the path from Haymer's, and go over to the edge er ther clifts and stan' there lookin' off fer er spell. I reckon he was lookin' at Willoughby — you kin see a little peek of it from there, an' a sight of the Rymals' place too. An' then directly I seed you come along ther path an' I knowed by yer walk yer was drunk. Mr. Calvert turned round when he heered yer, an' then he turned back ergin, not payin' no 'tention ter yer, an' then you come up behind him walkin' unsteady like, and then —" she paused, and Emlyn waited tensely.

"Then?" he breathed.

"An' then," she said in a low voice, "you took yer two hands an' give him a shove, and with a great holler he went right down over ther clifts, and the ground broke away there an' the dust flew up in a little cloud."

She spoke as though she saw the actual scene before her eyes, making with her hands the same vivid gesture that she had made before. So speaking was the gesture and so sharp a scene did it call up, that suddenly Emlyn saw before his mind again that picture of a man's figure standing upon the edge of the cliffs, and

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then all at once a pair of hands planted themselves upon the man's back. It was only for a moment that he saw it, then the recollection broke and swirled away in a tangled obscurity. Momentary as the vision was, however, it was sufficient to convince him of the truth of the woman's words.

There was silence for a time between them as Maria Crocroft's low words faded away on the air. Emlyn knew himself for a murderer and there was no gesture, no word, that could express the situation. He had touched the rock-bottom of the abyss of remorse and horror.

In the stillness the laugh of the idiot floated faintly in from a distance, and a soft wandering wind rustled through the dried stems of a dead morning-glory vine which still clung to the pillars of the little porch without.

"But why didn't you tell them I had done it?" Emlyn said at last. "Why did you say it was an accident?"

Maria Crocroft's hands shook a little in her lap.

"I couldn't," she said. "I meant to er done it — but I jest couldn't. When it come to the p'int I thought maybe you had er mother an' I knowed how awful it would be fer her an' I couldn't do it — I jest couldn't. It seems like to me mothers hev such a turrible time anyhow. An' yer needn't be feared, I won't tell on yer," she added.

Emlyn rose. He could not thank her, it was all too horrible. Yet in spite of his own misery her poverty and unhappiness moved him to pity, and taking some

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money from his pocket-book he held it out to her, offering it now in the fellowship of tragedy.

But she pushed his hand sharply aside.

"Take it away!" she cried vehemently. "I don't want it, I tell yer — I won't tech it — take it away! I won't hev yer money, I ain't no beggar!"

The faded eyes flamed and the pale cheeks showed a hint of colour, as she stood up straight and proud before him.

Emlyn put the money away again.

"I beg your pardon," he said earnestly, "I am sorry."

He had never been indifferent to the feelings of others, but in the face of his own misfortune he seemed now brought into closer touch with the suffering of all the world. He paused a moment upon the threshold of the little room; without for him was a blank world, yet here was a woman who was very unhappy. In spite of himself he turned and held out his hand to her.

"Good-by," he said, his grasp closing upon her hard fingers. "I am sorry — sorry you have had such awful trouble."

For the first time Maria Crocroft's eyes softened with a mist of tears. Her sensitive mouth twitched and she turned her head aside.

"Oh, it don't matter erbout me," she faltered. "I reckon somebody's got to hev trouble in the world, an' I suppose it might jest as well be me as anybody else."



## CHAPTER XI

### IN THE GRIP OF CHANCE

At the foot of the yard Emlyn climbed heavily across the fence once more and, unhitching his horse, mounted and turned away down the mountain side, flinging his body back mechanically in the saddle as the animal picked his way cleverly down the steep descent. Where the path ascends a little again, turning toward the broader track leading past George Haymer's cabin and then out into the main road of the hollow, Emlyn paused for a brief moment to look once more upon the Dark Tower—the little silent cabin, hung there upon the side of the sheer mountain, the black slate of which showed in patches through the sparse low-growing bushes. The cabin door was shut again, and there was no sign of life about it now save for the faint, almost imperceptible curl of smoke that went silently up from the chimney, and the tiny splash of green that the plant of wandering jew made in the window. At the back the mountain rose to a bare and rocky summit, the outline of which reared itself in inexorable ruggedness against the arch of the blue sky.

For a long minute, turned in his saddle, his hand

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resting upon his horse's flank, Emlyn sat and stared up at the cabin. It was all mysterious and strange, but the strangeness of it was overwhelmed to nothingness by the horror.

Afterwards he rode on. But when he had passed the Haymers' cabin where the children paused in their play and stared at him, and had come into the smooth track of the main road, he went along it only a little way. Then he turned his horse into the woods and rode a short distance up one of the hollows. When he was well out of sight of the road he dismounted and, hitching his horse, went a little deeper into the heart of the mountains, and flung himself down upon the ground. The warm earth received him upon her kindly bosom and made for him a soft bed of her rustling dried leaves which the sunshine had heated to a comforting geniality.

He crooked one arm and put his head down upon it, inhaling unconsciously the sharp fragrance of the dying leaves, the while the sun beat warmly upon his back. And in all that warmth and sunshine one great ominous fact pulsed through him in breaths of horror. He was a murderer, a murderer. He whispered the words over and over, and he would have cried and screamed them aloud, and rolled upon the leaves, digging his frantic fingers deep into the ground, only a long-cultivated instinct of pride and reserve kept him silent. He was a murderer. One short hour — nay, less than that — had changed the whole face of his universe. He who had never been ashamed to look

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any man in the face was possessed now by the awful stunning realization that he had killed a man. A murderer not from some terrible, unpreventable accident, but a murderer because he had been drunk. He, Page Emlyn, who of all men had known the awfulness of intemperance, had let himself get drunk, and in his intoxication he had killed a man. *He*, whose scorn and loathing for drink had rooted itself in the very inmost fibres of his being! In the midst of all his pride, the devil of drink had suddenly set its clutch of disaster upon him, more surely even than it had upon his father. In one brief half-hour the thing had come upon him — had borne him out upon its terrible waves to play with him, to make sport of his scorn and arrogant self-assurance, and then to cast him back upon the shores of consciousness a murderer.

The cold shadow of a black remorse went over Page Emlyn, and he groaned again and again.

He did not pause to excuse himself over the fact that he had taken the drink which had turned the scales between intoxication and sobriety that day in a spirit of kind-hearted sympathy to save George Haymer's feelings. In fact he did not remember it, his remorse was too sharply keen for that. At last he lay still, the very overwhelmingness of the horror giving him the calm of despair.

He would have liked to beat his hands upon the ground and shriek aloud to the silent mountains that he was a murderer, a murderer! But what was the good of that? Could all his frantic remorse give James

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Calvert back to one breath of life again? Dissipate the grief of his stricken family, or even piece together Page Emlyn's own shattered existence? Alas and alas! Fate plays a sudden card and all the game of life is changed — as irretrievably changed as the slight turning of a kaleidoscope obliterates forever one of its bright pictures of colour and reflection.

He lay still a little longer, exhausted and almost too confused to think. Presently however, inevitably, the spirit of youth that was in him, stirred, and called on him to take hold upon the situation. He sat up, staring across the sunlit hollow, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

He was a murderer — yes — but what was he going to do about it? *What* was he going to do? Strangely enough circumstances had made it so that the choice of what he should do lay with himself. The secret was his very own. He could arise now, go out of the little hollow, mount his waiting horse and, riding back to Willoughby, take the eleven o'clock train that night and the next morning be back in Cincinnati once more, there quietly to assume his accustomed life, with the terrible event of the Raven Rocks a turned page in the book of his existence. He would meet his friends and acquaintances, go his familiar way of pleasure and business, and no one would ever know that away in the silence and remoteness of the West Virginia mountains he had killed a man.

It was all so easy. The thought of it was cosy and safe and terribly alluring. After all, why should one

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mistake — just one little mistake — be allowed to wreck his whole happy, promising young life? Great Heavens, didn't plenty of men he knew get drunk time and again without apparently any awful consequences? Of course they did. The names of half a dozen of his acquaintances flashed through his brain, and he paused a moment thinking about them, while the back of his mind played with the alluring possibility of his escape. They were all happy enough — those men — no great calamity had come upon them, though they got drunk constantly. But he, *he* had been intoxicated just once in all his life, and Fate had returned him to sobriety a murderer. He was no more guilty than all those other men, then why should he let his life be blighted by a spiteful trick of circumstance? He was no murderer in his heart — never had been and never would be — then why in God's name should he be made to inherit a remorse far greater than the sin he had committed? After all hadn't he a right to his life — to his splendid young life, and the respect of all his city? Had not the tendencies of almost all his life been honest and kind? Then why should he reap for one hour of intemperance a murderer's reward instead of the fruits of his straight and sober life? Were not his thirty honourable years far more his real self, and therefore the reward that should be his, rather than that one black afternoon, the harvest of which had been so terrible? Look at those other men — his mind went back to the thought of them in constant resentment — were any of them murderers? No, cer-

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tainly not. Nor was he a murderer at heart. At heart he was just the same Page Emlyn who had left Cincinnati that morning a week ago. Then why should he not return there, take up the friendships that were his and continue his old life fearlessly? It was all so easy and so simple — and, "I have a right to my life, a right to it, a right to it!" he cried fiercely. "I won't be cheated out of my rightful heritage and what is the fruit of my real self by just one damnable hour with the devil. I have a right, a right to my life," he cried rebelliously, "and I *will* live it!"

He rose in his determination and took a few steps down the hollow. Yet in a moment he paused and sunk down upon the ground once more.

Could he do it? It was all easy enough to be sure on the surface, but could *he* do it? Was it in him to carry it through? Could he go back there to his home city and, meeting his friends, slip back into the respect and regard that had been his, and take up his old life, forgetting that here in West Virginia he was a murderer? Would not the black thing be forever jumping fearfully out at him at every turn, just when he was happiest and most secure? Would not some careless word, some account of a murder in the newspapers, remind him of what he was? Would he not always be in the clutching fear of discovery?

As looked at in imagination it seemed a terrible life; yet the only other alternative was confession. Confession? His mind paused for a space over all that it stood for, all that it would mean to him. He put

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his head in his arms once more and groaned, rocking slightly back and forth. Surely he could not face it. And why should it be required of him, what good would there be in the wrecking of his own life? Could it help James Calvert's family one little atom? No — no — poor people, poor people! What could he ever do to mitigate their sorrow? Suddenly in all the dread and confusion in which he groped, his mind shot back to poor little Dolly Calvert's shaking figure in Hester Rymal's arms; to Mrs. Calvert's sombre tragedy when she had put her terrible question to him. He saw again the picture of her spare figure, and how her thin white wrists had looked when she put her hands up to her face. And it was all his fault — his fault. He was consumed by a sweeping flame of remorse and, for the first time since the event, he wept. All his rebellion and all his love of his own life melted in his self-condemnation and pity for the calamity he had brought upon others. And as he wept his whole being was softened and purified. He lost account of himself, and his heart came at length into a place that was removed beyond the thought of his own life.

He rose at last tranquillized and determined. There was nothing, he felt in keen realization of his remorse, that was left to him save confession. It would not help the Calverts, yet it seemed to him now the only possible thing for him to do. He was possessed with a desire for the truth and a desire to make what atonement lay in him by confession, and taking the punishment that was his, stand forth freely and

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fearlessly, in his own eyes and in the eyes of his God.

He stood still for a moment longer in the little hollow, and he seemed to himself a changed man. The careless indifference of his nature slipped from him, and beaten and exhausted he returned somewhat to the unselfishness and devotion of his early youth. He was not a man made over — alas! and alas! that is a thing wrought only through time and tears. But he was a man suddenly aware of the best and highest within himself. And with this consciousness of his own highest self, a great illuminating realization of God rushed upon him, so that suddenly, involuntarily, he took off his hat. He did not pray, but out there in the stillness and peace of the little hollow, a broken and exhausted man, he came for a moment into the unspeakable presence of God.

Afterwards he came down the hollow, and mounting his horse rode fearlessly away toward Willoughby and all that awaited him there.



## CHAPTER XII

### IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

It was late in the afternoon when Page Emlyn came into Calvert's Valley from the mouth of the Sweet Run Hollow, and turned north, riding steadily toward Willoughby, and toward the fulfilment of his resolution.

The whole valley seemed very calm and peaceful, and serenely undisturbed by the energies of life, as it lay tranquilly outspread in the mellow somnolent light of lazy afternoon. At the Swamp Creek ford the water whispered softly across the stones, or lay in little quiet pools asleep, as though it had forgotten its intention of going to the sea. The wind blew across the brown hillsides, flashing the shining stems of the weeds and grasses to a silver ripple. In little wandering breaths of energy it went softly here and there on tip-toe, like a silent child playing by itself. There was a great still peace, and fairy glamour of unreality over the land, and as he rode into it, Page Emlyn felt as though he were riding into the heart of a mysterious far-away dream. The gentle fitful breeze, the faint music from the river, the perfume of ripe apples and cut fodder, all made up a tender silence and serenity. To Emlyn it seemed as though Nature looked at him and smiling

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laid her finger to her lips, whispering "Hush," and showing him her sleeping valley as though it were her child at rest.

And as he came step by step into all that sweet serenity and happy repose, Emlyn seemed to be gathered into the arms of a great stillness and peace and calm. He was tranquillized and reassured by it. Yet as he rode he was very conscious that every step his horse took was bringing him nearer and nearer to the expiation he had laid out for himself; that every breath of time which went so dreamily on its way, was bringing him closer to that terrible event by which he would cross, in the eyes of the world, the bridge between his old cheerful and respected life to that new existence in which he must stand forth a murderer.

Though it was so still and quiet there were, nevertheless, signs of a drowsy life at the different farms as he passed up the valley. Here was a load of fodder being hauled to the stack-yard. There, a man mended his bit of fencing; or here again a field was being ploughed, the farmer calling to his horses as he went back and forth across the soft uneven ground. At the Rymals' place the windows were thrown wide open staring out upon the valley. Down at the barn, Jim, the coloured stable boy, was singing as he worked, "Oh, hit has come down, an' hit will come down, an' I pray de Lord to sen' hit down!" On the porch a magazine, left there with Mrs. Blair's red shawl, fluttered its leaves slightly in the wind, and Hester's black and tan collie paid Emlyn the conventional tribute of a bark or two.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Over at the Bedingers their horse was hitched at the rack, awaiting Tessie's volatile little personality.

There was evidence of life and animation everywhere. But it all seemed to Emlyn a dream life because of his own vivid consciousness.

His plans were very simple. First he would go back to his rooms, and transact a little business that was almost imperative. Then he would hunt up the sheriff — he would hunt up the sheriff, his mind reeled a little at the thought — and — that would be all.

On the outskirts of Willoughby stood the house to which the Calverts had moved after the sale of their old place opposite the Rymals. This present abode was an old-fashioned building somewhat out of repair, with a small orchard on one side of it, and a large yard running down to the street, from which it was shut away by a picket fence and stile of whitewashed steps.

Standing on these steps, as Emlyn came into Willoughby, were two people, a man and a woman. The man was Eugene Calvert, James Calvert's young brother. The woman was Hester Rymal. The latter was evidently just taking her leave, for presently she stepped down off the steps and came along the street toward Emlyn.

She was very graceful and tall in her white cotton frock, and for a space before they met, watching the easy buoyancy of her carriage, Emlyn had a sense of exultation that here at least was someone who was young and strong and unbroken as yet by the grip of life. Yet when she came opposite to him and raised her

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

eyes he saw a shadow of unhappiness in the depths of them, and suddenly he remembered that her life too had been bound up in that of James Calvert. His face grew a shade more pale and his lips more straight and firm. Here was another link in the chain of tragedy which he had forged.

Hester did not pause as she greeted him, and Emlyn continued steadily on his way. As he passed the Calverts' house, however, Eugene Calvert called to him.

"O Mr. Emlyn," he said, and stopped.

Page pulled up his horse and waited. In the face of the confession that he was about to make, it seemed almost impossible that he should dare to hold converse with any of the Calverts.

"O Mr. Emlyn," Eugene said again, "are you very busy just now?"

"Why, no," Emlyn returned objectively, though a little subjective devil of thought stirred and whispered within him, "Not very busy, oh no, only getting ready to confess that I killed your brother."

"Anything I can do for you?" he added, and intentionally he threw into his voice a pleasant interest and friendliness. For surely, he felt, any demand from a member of this family must engage his closest attention.

Eugene Calvert was not more than twenty-one or two and there was a certain boyishness about him that was very sincere and appealing.

"I wanted to have a little talk with you if I might," he said hesitatingly.

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"Why, of course," said Emlyn. "Come over to the hotel. I'm just going to take this horse down to the livery stable, and I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Much obliged," said Eugene, "I'll be over directly."

His horse returned to its stable, Emlyn made his way back to the Sheehan House. He was stopped for a moment and compelled to reply as best he might to Mrs. Sheehan's inquiries as to the success of his ride. She had been rocking comfortably on her front porch in the sunshine, resting after her arduous labour of the morning. And as she sat and rocked, her hands cuddled warmly together under her apron, she was thinking that she had promised Mrs. Beaks a slip of her fish geranium and one from her yellow arbution, and that she must remember to take them over to her. But when Emlyn came up the steps she greeted him, and rising followed him indoors. "Did you find what you'd lost?" she inquired.

"What I'd lost?" Emlyn returned, pausing with his hand on the stair rail, and a little puzzled, having forgotten his words of the morning.

"Yes, what you went out to hunt for by the Raven Rocks," she said.

"Oh, *that*," said Emlyn. "No, I didn't find it — I was foolish to think I should." His lips set themselves a trifle and he started on up the stairs.

"Well, now, ain't that too bad, and you had that long ride all for nothin'," Mrs. Sheehan complained sympathetically. "I reckon it must have been right

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

sort er strange to go back to them rocks, wasn't it?" she went on.

"Yes," said Emlyn, going steadily on his way up the steps. "It seemed very strange — I shouldn't want to do it again," he added.

"Well, I should guess not," Mrs. Sheehan returned. "I always do say when anything just awful's happened, the sooner a body can forget about it the better." And thereafter she went back to her placid rocking-chair and settled herself comfortably once more.

Emlyn entered his room wondering with a dreary amusement what she would say when she heard the truth. He could not help thinking that in all probability she would say, "Well, now, ain't that just too bad!" Or would it be, perhaps, "Oh, ain't it a sad pity, and he seemed to be such a nice young man too."

His mind took up the idea and played with it, forming imaginary sentences appropriate to her personality, as often, in the midst of the greatest calamity the perverse human brain refuses to be continually faced by tragedy, and wanders rebelliously away along any trivial path of escape which offers. It was not long, however, that Emlyn was left to pursue this little by-path of fancy, for in a moment a knock fell on his door announcing Eugene Calvert.

For one brief second it seemed to Emlyn an impossibility for him to meet Eugene. He had a wild weak desire to flee — to hide somewhere, to escape. Yet in the next moment his courage rose to the occasion.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Again the knock came and Emlyn called out "Come in" this time, and Eugene entered.

He was a tall young fellow, but slender, with none of the bull strength that had characterized James. His face was like his brother's in its vivid dark colouring, but it lacked the latter's arrogant determination and heaviness of expression. It was less strong, but it was more attractive. It was perhaps what James Calvert's might have been had he not had to begin his fight with the world so early in life. Eugene had been spared this by having James for an older brother. It had been the latter's best trait that he had always been very good to the members of his family. Eugene had not led, by any means, an easy life, but he had always had his older brother to stand between him and the keenest edge of misfortune. It seemed an irony of fate that what made Eugene attractive had been won for him by his brother's fighting aggressiveness — that very quality which had made James unattractive.

Eugene came over to the window and sat down by Emlyn in one of the stiff and uncompromising chairs of the room. The window looked out upon the quiet dusty main street of Willoughby, which was empty now save for a couple of little boys, a stray dog, and a thoughtful cow.

"I want to thank you for all your kindness to us," he said. His manner was shy but earnest.

"Oh, don't speak of it," said Emlyn, hastily, almost sharply. "It was nothing, nothing."

"You did a great deal," Eugene persisted, "and I

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want to thank you for myself and for my mother and sister too — for us all,” he said, with a certain young and pathetic dignity; he was not used to being the spokesman of the family.

“How is Mrs. Calvert — and your sister?” Emlyn asked quickly, keenly anxious to stem his gratitude.

“Oh, they are well — as well as can be expected. It has been a terrible thing — so awful — so sudden —” he broke off, biting his lip.

Emlyn turned away and looked out at the quiet street, at the straggling houses opposite, and the serenely clear sky.

“They both seemed to me wonderfully brave,” he said in a constrained voice, “your mother particularly.”

“Oh yes, she is wonderful,” said Eugene; “so brave — so fine, all the time. I think he was her favourite of us all — but she keeps up, and goes on seeing to things — oh! she is wonderful —” he broke off.

Emlyn was still turned half away looking out of the window.

“It has been terrible for you all,” he said. His words were scarcely audible and he felt as though a hand were choking him.

Eugene nodded, biting his lip again. “He — he was the best fellow in the world to me,” he said, his voice running unsteadily up into high uncertain notes. “It does seem so strange — so terrible. Here he was the head of the family, and doing so well — everybody respected him — and *now* —” he stopped abruptly. “And he was only twenty-eight years old,” he said in a



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low voice. He got up quickly and going over to the mantelpiece stood staring down into the empty grate.

Emlyn still sat looking out upon the roofs of the houses opposite, and the splashes of bright colour that the trees made here and there. It seemed to him that he was frozen to that attitude, that he could not turn to the right or left, that he must stare forever out upon the bright sleepy scene with a sick remorse at his heart.

Eugene recovered himself presently and coming back sat down in his chair again.

"I came over to ask your advice," he said. "To see if you would help me about something," he added deprecatingly.

An astonishing warm rush of gladness went over Emlyn and loosed him suddenly from the frozen tenseness of his attitude.

"Why, of course I will help you about anything I can — I should be glad to do it," he said eagerly.

He did not know what the boy wanted, but that there should be anything which he could do filled Emlyn with a quick gratitude.

"I hardly know you — only — only — you've been so good, and I didn't know anyone else to go to," Eugene said.

Emlyn laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "I am glad you came to me," he answered. "I am glad there is anything I can do to help you." Eugene glanced at him, embarrassed but grateful, also a little surprised perhaps by the other's eagerness of manner.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"I want to ask you," he began, rushing at his request, "if you could help me about getting some work — something to do — I thought being in touch with those Cincinnati people you might be able to help me to a job." He spoke earnestly and his embarrassment was gone.

"Why, yes, I think I could," Emlyn said consideringly. "Anyway I should be very glad to try, but I thought — surely somebody told me you were studying medicine at Johns Hopkins."

"I was — yes," Eugene returned in a constrained manner, his face flushing a little.

The tone of his voice and the flush gave Emlyn a sudden intuition. He remembered having heard that James was paying for Eugene's course at the medical school, and he guessed that his brother's death had necessitated for him the giving up of something that he cared about very much.

"You decided you didn't want to be a doctor after all?" he said to try him.

He was surprised at the result of his question.

The colour swept up into Eugene's forehead and his eyes flashed. "Don't *want* to be a doctor!" he cried passionately. "Great Heavens and earth — it's all I've ever wanted to be, or ever shall — ever since I could remember I've meant to be a doctor — and planned and worked for it!" He jumped up and began pacing back and forth. "And I will be yet!" he cried incoherently. "It's what I was meant to be — what I care for more than anything else, and I *will* be!" he cried, "I

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will be, if I have to grub my very finger-nails off to get the money for it!"

Emlyn's question had tapped the hidden springs of the boy's nature. This was the thing that was vital to him, the thing that he wanted to do, and knew that he could do — his treasure of ability.

Emlyn saw and understood.

"I only need enough for two years more," Eugene went on quickly. "I should have taken more time ordinarily, but I can do it in two years — I *know* I can. If I can just get some work to do this winter to give me a little start I can grub along somehow for the rest. I'd wanted to go all my life — I'd scraped up a little myself and poor James was helping me with the rest" — he paused; "but of course now it's all different," he went on. "My mother will have barely enough for herself and my sister, so I can't take any of hers, and —"

"Look here," Emlyn interrupted eagerly, his words almost incoherent with desire. "Let me lend you the money to go through on — I want to do it — I should like to do it. I'm all alone in the world, and I've had some streaks of luck lately so that I've got more than I really know what to do with. Let me lend it to you," he almost begged. "Come on!" he cried, "let's see if we can't make a doctor between us. It's a great profession — one of the finest, I always thought so — and I'd be very glad to have a hand in turning out a member of it. You take in the ideas, and I'll see that you have the money for them. Come on, let's get up

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a partnership." He spoke quickly, feverishly, hardly knowing what he said. At the moment he was conscious only of an overwhelming desire that Eugene should accept his offer. It seemed to give him a possibility of atonement.

An eager light flared up in Eugene's face. It was the momentary unbridled speaking of his great desire, the leap of his waiting talent that cried out imperiously within him. But the next moment the Calvert pride rose in its place.

"You are very good," he said a little stiffly, "but of course I could not think of borrowing from you—why, I scarcely know you."

"But what difference does that make?" Emlyn returned warmly. "I'm willing and glad to do it—you have the call of a great talent in you, and you have no right to let your pride put off the fulfilment of it."

"How do you mean?" said Eugene, pausing in his refusal to catch, in spite of his pride, at this new phase of the idea.

"Why, just what I say," Emlyn rushed on. "You have a great desire to be a doctor and the desire nearly always carries its ability with it. It's a great gift—the genius for medicine—a splendid gift. It makes it possible for you to lift a little of the suffering of the world. It is one of God's great forces, and you have no right—no right, I say, to let anything interfere with the fulfilment of it." He was surprised at himself; he never remembered having thought these things

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before. Something seemed to be speaking through him. But that did not matter now. What did matter was that the other should accept his offer.

Eugene paused, looking at him.

"I wonder if that is true," he said thoughtfully.

"True? Of course it's true?" Emlyn returned quickly, pressing the point. "If you have a great talent by which you can alleviate to a certain extent the misery of others, it must belong to God — don't you see it must? And that takes it out of the personal realm and makes it wrong for you to do anything to block its accomplishment." Again he was astonished at himself. Page Emlyn was not in the habit of speaking thus glibly of God and His intentions. "Don't think I am preaching to you," he added, "I am not — yes, I am, though, but I think I am doing more, I think I am telling you the truth."

Eugene turned away and paced a time or two up and down the room. Evidently he was debating the matter within himself. Emlyn was afraid to speak — afraid almost to move; his whole feeling was concentrated in a great eagerness.

The boy turned at last and came back to him. "I believe you're right," he said, his face radiant. "Anyway, whether you're right or not, you've put it to me in such a way that I can accept your offer and be grateful."

"Good man!" cried Emlyn. The blood rushed up in his head so that his ears sang, and he was borne up on the breath of a great triumph.

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"How can I thank you?" Eugene went on. "I can't begin to thank you —" he stopped, the words lost in his embarrassment. "But I tell you it won't be my fault if I don't make just the finest doctor the old Johns Hop' ever turned out, and that's saying a good deal," he added.

"Of course you will!" cried Emlyn, heartily. "I'll trust you for that."

Eugene laughed. "I must go," he said. "I must tell them at home."

"All right," said the other. "But come over in the morning so we can arrange matters."

Emlyn stood with the light of triumph still in his eyes until the door closed upon Eugene, then he turned once more to the window, the illumination still on his face. For a moment the rush of his exultation lasted, then suddenly, unexpectedly, it scattered like an exploded bubble, and he stood face to face with the truth.

He had slammed the door shut on his confession.

With no conscious intention of doing so he had made it impossible for him to acknowledge his crime.

Was it likely that Eugene would take money from his brother's murderer?

He was aghast at himself. He had had every intention of confessing and accepting the load of his guilt, and now by his own sudden act he had put it out of his power. There was, of course, a chance that he might confess and then make some secret arrangement by which the money for his medical course could be given to Eugene. But remembering his own show

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of eagerness, Emlyn knew that there was no adequate scheme for concealing the donation. So if he confessed it would mean the blocking for perhaps years of Eugene's career.

Emlyn paced up and down the room confronted by this new and erratic twist of fate. He had decided to confess, certainly, but now to acknowledge his guilt seemed almost selfish, a mere discipline for his own soul. It seemed to him that he had been driven to a point of renunciation where he must not only sacrifice his own life, but his soul as well if necessary. There would be no good in his avowal for those he had injured. Indeed it would do Eugene, at least, positive harm. In all honesty he had meant to confess, but a mighty hand, as it were, had come out of the dark and uncertainty which surrounds human existence and had snatched the ability to do so away from him.

Emlyn flung himself down upon his bed. It all seemed very strange, and he was conscious of a great weariness and confusion from the tossing to and fro of fortune, and exhausted by his own play of emotion. But as he lay there he became aware that another idea was presenting itself to him. The hand of fate that had snatched away his confession was offering now, as it were, another atonement. In the act of helping Eugene he had behaved as an older brother might have done—as James Calvert had done, in fact. He had momentarily stepped into the dead man's place. He had done it once—what if he did it again? What if he gave up his own life in Cincinnati and,

## CHAPTER XIII

### "THE MORN AND LIQUID DEW OF YOUTH"

THE year had advanced almost a month on its trackless path since the day that Page Emlyn had found his Dark Tower up in the Sweet Run Hollow, not far from the Raven Rocks, and had thereafter come to his grim resolution, caught in the sudden entanglement of circumstances.

Nature, looking over her hand, drew out the card marked November and played it, and all the world followed suit. Calvert's Valley put out its autumnal fires of yellow and red foliage and took on a sober brown and grey habit, just touched here and there on the mountain sides with colour, where the scrub oaks still persisted in remembering their October crimson. The month had opened with a cold burst of uncertain weather which waked one in the morning to find a skim of snow on the tops of the mountains, with a blustering day of sunshine and cloud to follow. But that was early in the month; it was the middle now and the year had paused to take breath in the repose and peace of a belated Indian summer, before beginning the long climb of the Christmas hill. Now the colour of the Indian summer is blue — blue hazy mountains, faint blue-



## "THE MORN AND LIQUID DEW OF YOUTH"

grey sky, and blue reflections in the little meandering streams. Its wistful perfume is of dried pennyroyal and dead leaves, with a faint smell of smoke from forest fires. The taste of it is cider and nuts, and its sound the quarrelling of the blue jays among the fence rows. While the whole feel of it is a balmy peace, and a certain warm trusting sunshine for the soul.

Yet though the weather made for peace, there was, nevertheless, stir and energy and a touch of the vigour of life about the Breezes' homestead on this gentle fourteenth of November. And the reason for this was that young Richard Breeze, the oldest son and heir apparent, was setting forth to seek his fortune in the world, accompanied, like the orthodox young man of the fairy story, with his father's and mother's blessing, and a precious gift or two.

The Breezes' farm lay well down at the foot of Calvert's Valley where the valley narrows, and dividing into three hollows is lost among the mountains, forgetting the sweep and breadth that it had for three or four miles below Willoughby. The foot of the valley is fifteen miles or so from Willoughby, and is regarded by the dwellers of that place as lying quite away from the pulse of life. It is, however, possible to drive over to the village from the Breezes' farm in the morning, shop, and return in the afternoon, having been refreshed by a touch of city excitement.

It was in Willoughby that Richard Breeze planned to find fame and fortune. There he meant to establish himself as a lawyer, and on this particular morn-

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ing the whole family had turned out to watch him take his departure.

The family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Breeze, Lotty and Emmy, the girls, and Tom the youngest boy, all stood upon the porch steps and offered advice or assistance, or obeyed Richard's directions with alacrity; for they were a good and a dutiful family, and were properly impressed with a sense of the honour and distinction of possessing a young man who was setting out in life.

Richard, one foot upon the wheel and one upon the bed of a single-horse spring wagon, balanced himself rather precariously, the while he wrestled with a refractory rocking-chair which refused to associate itself in a friendly spirit with a desk, a trunk, a book-case, an office chair, and sundry other household gods which were to set forth with him.

"I always *did* hate a rocking-chair," he complained bitterly through closed teeth, "but I've got to have something for clients to sit in, I suppose."

"O Tommy, *do* go and hold old Charley's head! I'm *so* afraid he will give a jump while Richard's standing like that!" Mrs. Breeze begged, the while she drew her little checked black and brown shawl closer around her shoulders with nervous hands.

Tommy obeyed leisurely; not for the world would a gentleman of twelve show any haste or agitation where a horse was concerned.

"There!" cried Richard, triumphantly, as the rocking-chair at last consented to go in next to the desk.

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“Now, then,” he continued with spirit, “hand me up those other things — no, not those, that pile of books there — that’s the ticket, Emmy. Look out, mother! don’t you try to lift that. Yes, stick the typewriter right in here. O goodness, Lotty, what’s *that*?”

“It’s just a jar of my peach preserves, Dicky. I thought you wouldn’t mind taking it over to Hester for me — I want Cousin Lizzie to see what nice preserves I can make,” said Lotty, the little dark sister, as she approached the wagon with an assumed confidence which in reality she was far from feeling. She carried a glass preserve jar, wrapped around with newspaper and tied firmly with a string.

“Shall I just tuck it into this drawer of the desk, Dick? Then you’ll know where to find it, and it won’t be around in your way.”

“No, you *won’t!*” roared Richard. “All my legal cap is in there.”

“O *Dicky!*” cried Lotty with mock breathlessness. “What are legal caps — may I just look at them?” Standing on tip-toe on the porch steps she reached over precariously, and pulled open the desk drawer; then she turned and beckoned Emmy forward with an impressive hand. “That, Emmy,” she whispered, pointing to the neat pile of white fool’s-cap paper that the drawer revealed, “that is legal cap — you may look at it for a moment, mayn’t she, Dicky?” she appealed, raising her brown mischievous eyes to her brother’s face. She peeped over once more. “Sh-sh-sh,” she whispered, putting one finger on her

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lips and shutting the drawer very softly. 'Sh-sh-sh! It's got blue eyes, but you can't see them now because it's asleep!'

"Before I'd be an *idiot!*" said Richard.

"Before I'd be a *lawyer!*" Lotty flung back. "Well, what about this next drawer?" she persisted, going on to the lower one.

"That's full too," her brother returned, yet with a certain nervousness.

"Why, what's *it* got in it?" Lotty inquired, pulling the drawer open — "*O Dicky!*"

"What!" cried Mrs. Breeze and Emmy together, craning over from the porch steps.

"Why, mother! All his socks and night shirts!" Lotty cried with a little irresistible bubble of laughter. "Oh! right in the very *next* drawer to the legal caps!"

"Well," Richard grumbled, "isn't that an all right enough place for them? Nobody reminded me of 'em and so I forgot to put 'em in the trunk."

"The preserves could go in there splendidly," Lotty cried with enthusiasm.

"No — no, Lotty," Mr. Breeze broke in. "Don't worry Dick with that truck now — a *man* can't be bothered with those sort of things."

Lotty held her preserve jar hugged close in her arms, and even put her cheek down against it for she had an affection for her preserves — cookery being *her* treasure of ability. "Last night at supper, with some butter and a hot roll," she said in a soft small voice, "Dicky didn't mind being bothered with 'em. But that,"

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she added with her little sudden chuckle, "was before he started out on his career."

"Never mind, Lotty," said Emmy, softly, "we can drive over to Willoughby next week and take them to Hester ourselves." She was that type of dark maidenhood which is gentle and sweet and always thinking about other people.

"Oh, here, pitch it up!" cried Richard, relenting. "Patrick Henry, and Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster, and all those old busters, each of 'em had to do something or other, cut wood, or wear one overcoat between 'em, or something, I can't remember just what, so I reckon travelling with a preserve jar won't faze my career."

"Emmy," said Lotty, "your brother is sure to succeed in the law — he states things with such force and clearness." Nevertheless, she handed up the jar gratefully enough.

"There! that's all!" Richard continued. "Now, then, gentlemens, we'll be ready in a jiffy! Oh gee! where's my shingle? I mustn't forget *that* — hand it up, Emmy."

"And handle it ve — ry carefully, Emmy," Lotty admonished her.

The shining tin sign with its black lettering, "Richard Breeze, Attorney-at-law," was handed up, and Richard received it affectionately. It bent in his hands and gave off a deep whisper of metallic sound, as tin things will, while the flashes which the sun drew from it quite dazzled the eyes of the whole family. And here one

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might pause and stray off among the by-paths of reflection induced by the thought of what a young man's first sign stands for to him. If it stands, as it should of right stand, for the profession he loves best in the world, then it is the summing up of all his ambitions, the thing which speaks of the desire of his heart. We might, I say, pause over these reflections, but perhaps, after all, they are best voiced in Richard's own simple words. Holding the sign out before him for a moment he looked at it—"Richard Breeze, Attorney-at-law," he read. "That's *me!*" he added triumphantly, yet also there was a certain surprise in his tone — a surprise at the realization of himself, the full-fledged lawyer at last. He stowed the sign away in a safe corner of the wagon, and then returned to business.

"Now, then, Tommy, pitch us up that rope so I can fasten this old devil of a rocking-chair steady."

"*O-h-h-h!*" cried Mrs. Breeze and Emmy in a falsetto chorus of shocked tones.

"There!" cried Richard, inwardly pleased by the little shock his adjective had occasioned, but outwardly impassive. "There!" He jumped down off the wagon and shook himself into his coat. "Now I guess she'll ride all right. Yes, I've got my dinner right here in my pocket — and there's Charley's under the seat. Well, so long, everybody."

He kissed his mother affectionately, his sisters more or less awkwardly; shook hands with his father, pinched Tommy, and so mounted to his precarious seat on the top of the wagon.

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“Tommy, *do* hold Charley until Richard has the reins!” Mrs. Breeze begged once more.

Tommy sprang forward and seizing old Charley’s bridle in both hands forced his head high up in the air, in a scientific manner, which he understood from the illustrations of sporting papers was the approved mode of exhibiting show horses. Charley, who had been standing much like a sheep with his head down, apparently lost in deep thought, pricked his ears at this unusual demonstration, and looked down his nose at Tommy with a mildly surprised eye.

“Tell me when to let go!” cried Tommy. “Whoa, Charley! Whoa-a, boy! Have you got the reins, Dick? I can’t hold him much longer — whoa — *now!*” He let go and sprang back dramatically, as one might start a race horse.

Old Charley removed a fly from his near flank with a leisurely tail and stood still.

Lotty entered into the spirit of the thing.

“We’d better lead him down the hill for Dick, Tommy,” she said. “You get on one side and I’ll take him on the other, and between us I *think* we can manage him. Have you got hold, Tom? Now, then, Dick, loosen up the lines a little — don’t be frightened, I think we can keep him from running.”

“Oh, get *out!*” cried Dick, viciously, cracking his whip and driving his solicitous brother and sister to a safe distance. A demonstration which at last had even the desired effect of starting Charley. Richard applied the brake for the steep hill at the front of the

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house, the wheels shuddered and shrieked under it, the piled-up load swayed ominously from side to side, the rocking-chair with a fat sigh fell over hopelessly against the desk, while all the things shifted and settled together, and Richard Breeze, Attorney-at-law, had started on his career. At the turn of the road by the little stunted apple tree he looked back and waved his hat. The family replied with heartiness. Then he turned round once more, with the opening stretches of the world and life before him.

"*Don't* watch him out of sight!" Mrs. Breeze admonished, and turning she went rather hastily into the house.

"Oh, *dear!*" cried Emmy, her soft brown eyes frankly full of tears; "but after all," she comforted herself, "he'll only be fifteen miles away."

"Don't you believe it!" cried Lotty, fierce with youthful discovery. "He won't be just the little distance away that Willoughby is from here, he'll be all the distance away that there is between a man's life and a girl's — and that's a thousand *million* miles!" she wound up passionately.

"Why, Lotty!" cried Emmy, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Lotty, shortly and, it must be admitted, crossly.

Emmy went close up to her and spoke softly. "Is it because Eugene Calvert's gone back to Baltimore?" she asked.

"Now that's so like a woman!" cried Lotty, bitterly,



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who, because she had always desired to be a man, could find nothing more unkind to say than that a woman was acting like a woman. "What in all the world makes you go jumping after Eugene when we're talking about Richard?"

"Well, we may be *talking* about Richard, but I reckon we're *thinking* about Eugene," Emmy returned. For all her gentleness, she had at times some of Lotty's own spirit of retort.

Meantime, with the world before him, Richard Breeze pursued his way slowly and creakingly. There was nothing to do save sit and hold the reins, encourage Charley with a word or two at steep hills, put on the brake on the down grades, and shout "Howdy," or "Hello," or "Howdy do, Mis' Bland," when he chanced upon a passerby; or again, "How're you, Stranger," with an affable wave of two fingers toward his hat, when the passerby happened, which indeed was rare, to be somebody he did not know. But for the most part the way was deserted, and with the genial peace of the day as inducement he fell into a long train of golden reverie, perched upon his wagon seat and staring across the hazy landscape, which in the yellow rays of the sunshine showed innumerable tiny companies of dancing ephemera; ephemera which may be fuzz, or may be folks. Fuzz, perhaps, from the wind-blown seed-vessels of the dead flowers; or again folks, perhaps — little insect folks of the tiniest variety, which to themselves doubtless appear to be of an infinite aliveness and importance, but which to us appear to be

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merely ephemera. Dear me! how much there is in the point of view! And considering that we are assured that God regards us not without consideration, it would seem as though the least we could do would be to show a like attitude of mind toward the ephemera.

Richard whistled a cheerful sunshiny tune as he pursued his dreams, which dreams went along two pathways, one leading up through many exciting vicissitudes and much hard work to the Chief Justiceship of the Supreme Court of the United States; and the other culminating in the sweet personality of little Dorothy Calvert.

Thus, with love and ambition going on tip-toe before him hand in hand, Richard made his way up the valley.

It was slow going, for the load was too heavy to allow of anything more than a sedate walk on old Charley's part, and by dinner time he was still a good many miles from his destination. He was, however, near the Swamp Creek ford, a pleasant little spot on the road, where, in a clump of maple trees at one side, could be found rest and quiet for man and beast. Richard drove his wagon in among the trees, unhitched old Charley and led him down to the creek to drink; afterwards he placed his dinner for him in a wooden bucket, and himself sat down upon a log to partake of the lunch that Lotty had put up for him.

Presently, as he sat thus staring up the road absently, his mind still busy with thoughts of Dolly and of the Supreme Bench, Josiah Beaks came into view, mounted upon his old dun-coloured horse. At sight of Richard

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and his household gods he pulled up, his small blue eyes — whose smallness exaggerated the sharp eagerness of his nose — taking in the whole wagon load. Then he turned out of the road and came over to Richard's log.

"Hello, Dick!" he said.

"Hello, Joe!" Richard responded.

Josiah Beaks was a small man with an inquiring air. Everything about him was meagre with the exception of his ears; of these, it was the general remark in the lower circles of the valley, that "Joe Beaks needn't to mind sleeping out nights, for he could just lay down on one year and cover up with the t'uther."

"Is it movin' day?" he inquired, looking at Richard's wagon.

"It's moving day with me all right," Richard assented.

"Goin' to hang out your shingle in Willoughby?" the other demanded.

"That's the ticket," said Dick. His manner lacked something of his usual cordiality and enthusiasm. Josiah Beaks always inspired him with a certain stiffening hostility.

"Reckon you calculate on rakin' in some of the deals that was comin' to James Calvert," Josiah pursued.

"No, I don't," Richard returned shortly. He had liked James Calvert and it jarred upon him to have Josiah speak so easily of the possibility of another's taking his place in so short a time.

"Well, it's just as well you ain't, then, for you're too late in the grabbin' game," Josiah returned.

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"How's that?" Richard demanded.

"Why, that Emlyn fellar that was with the party when James was killed saw the openin', and didn't let the grass grow under his feet none. He came in last week an' took over James' office, and stuck out his own shingle."

"Well, I'll be dogged, is that a fact?" asked Richard.

Josiah kicked his feet out of the stirrups and sat limply in his saddle. He nodded his head with a slow foreboding.

"Don't it look strange to you," he demanded, "that a fellar'd leave Cincinnati an' come and settle in a rotten little place like Willoughby? They say he had a good job there too; he was with the Rich Creek Lumber Company, and anybody'd know that's a *good* job."

"Hem-m," said Richard, thoughtfully, "it does seem curious."

"It *is* curious," Josiah returned. "And you notice what I say" — he gesticulated with one lean forefinger, — "there's something back of it," he said, dropping his voice almost to a whisper.

"Back of it, what do you mean?" Richard demanded loudly and cheerfully, for he did not like Josiah's air of mystery and refused to play to it.

"Well, you just wait an' see," Josiah returned. "A man don't leave a good job in the city an' come down into the country less there's something back of it. An' you just listen to me, it'll pay to watch any fellar that does, or he'll put a big deal through right here

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under our very noses." He reached for his dangling stirrups and stuck his feet back into them. "Well," he said, "I must be travellin'. So long. An' just you mind what I say—it'll pay to watch him." He turned his horse back into the road, and with a wave of his bony hand, went on his way.

Richard got up and began leisurely putting old Charley back into the shafts. As he did so he laughed every now and again. He knew nothing about Page Emlyn, except that he had been very kind and had done everything in his power for the Calverts at the time of James' death. From what he had seen of him then, Richard had been disposed to like him very much. It did seem strange, certainly, that a man should leave a good position in the city and settle in Willoughby, but what amused Richard was Josiah Beaks' air of virtuous caution. "It'll pay to watch him." Richard stopped fastening a trace, and putting his head back shouted with laughter; for "It'll pay to watch him every time" had come to be the counter-sign of the valley in regard to Mr. Beaks himself. The valley even went further, and affirmed that Joe Beaks was that crooked that when he took his clothes off nights he "jest natch'ly had to hang them up on corkscrews to keep 'em in shape."

"Oh, gee!" said Richard, drawing an exhausted breath and picking up his trace again. "Oh, *gee!*"

It was late in the afternoon when Richard at length pulled up before the building on Willoughby's main street in which he had secured an office. It was an

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SHIP-WRECKED SAILOR

PAGE EMLYN was quietly established in Willoughby. As the days swung by on their endless march, he found himself fitting more and more easily and naturally into the mosaic of life which belonged to the place and its people. The ease with which he had accomplished his purpose, and the slightness of the ripple caused by the letting go of his old environments, afforded him a little cynical breath of amusement over his own lack of importance. His move from Cincinnati to Willoughby had changed for him the whole outlook of his universe — to him it was indeed a very cataclysm. Yet it had scarcely made his own familiar world pause to take breath. There had of course been surprise and protest among his own particular friends when his decision became known; the general opinion being, that, for Page Emlyn to bury himself and his talents in an obscure place in West Virginia, was stark madness, and was, moreover, exceedingly trying and inconvenient to the social circle in which he had hitherto moved and had his being, and in which he had filled a somewhat peculiar place of his own. His friends flung themselves against his determina-

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tion in protest. He was a fool and a madman — and a murderer, Emlyn had added deep in his heart. But of course the protesting friends had not been aware of this — protesting friends so rarely are aware of any remarks one may make in the depths of one's own heart. What in Heaven's name, they had cried, was his object in going to a little lost place in West Virginia? Did he think that he could do any better there than he was already doing in Cincinnati?

Well, he had returned, Willoughby was a growing place, there was a good opening there for an energetic young lawyer, and moreover West Virginia had of late become a very promising State. Moreover, again, he had rather a hankering for the country. There was, he averred, a certain old-world flavour about country life which had lately begun to appeal to him. There was something fine and free and untrammelled about it — the distinction and poetry of existence, which one missed somehow in the cities. He made this last statement knowing that it would not be believed, and deriving a certain lonesome amusement from the frank incredulity in his friends' eyes. He was very well aware that he had never given them any reason to suppose that bucolic poetry and charm had any vital interest for him. His friends stared at him with unbelieving eyes, but at last, seeing that they could not prevent it, they shrugged their shoulders and let him go. And afterwards their life went on with its accustomed beat. As long as they had Page Emlyn they needed and wanted him, but once he was gone the need

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of him went also, and his place was filled by others. With the taking up of his new life in Willoughby, the doors of his old existence in Cincinnati fell shut perforce.

The ease with which he had accomplished his changed environment gave Emlyn, as I have said, a cynical realization of the slightness of his own importance. But he was too swallowed up in remorse and horror to have much edge of emotion left with which to comment upon life. Any great fixed emotion must of necessity change to some extent a man's outlook and his nature. The great overwhelming passion of Emlyn's existence was set in the grim remembrance of what Maria Crockett had told him of himself, back there in the stillness and silence of the mountains. His mind, his heart, his very soul, took hold upon the idea that he was a murderer; the inmost fibres of his being drank it in — it became, in fact, the event of his universe. All his own ambitions, the love of his own life, his rightful egotism, were drowned to nothingness in this stunning realization. He had gone down to the very cold deserted bottom of the sea of contrition, and when he came to the surface once more, his whole outlook upon life was changed. To every normal human being the centre of the universe — in this life certainly, whatever it may be in some other — is one's own self. Each life is perforce the centre of its own being, nor is it possible for anyone to get on to his own horizon. But this right to live his own life, to fight for his own ambitions, to gratify his own desires, Page Emlyn believed he



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had lost in that short afternoon of drunkenness. The right to his own life had been sacrificed, and had he not had another strong emotion to turn to, in the planning and carrying out of James Calvert's life, he would have been like a wistful, disembodied spirit, doomed to wander forever upon the outskirts of existence. As it was, however, prompted by his remorse, Emlyn let go of his own erstwhile ambitions and determinately seized upon James Calvert's. And blinded by his contrition he did not perceive, in the taking up of another's life, all the difficulties, nay almost impossibilities, of the situation which would immediately confront him. He did not realize that, aside from the natural perplexities of this new career, there was, as well, another long train of complications — those which are set suddenly in motion by any evasion of the truth, or any abnormal attitude toward existence.

It is probable that many men in Page Emlyn's position, indeed perhaps the majority of mankind, would have gone their way, remorseful certainly, but without sufficient edge to their remorse to make them sacrifice their own desires in atonement. Others, again, would have been so crushed with horror that the only possible restitution to their minds would have appeared to be suicide.

Page Emlyn, who had a healthy and normal love of his own life, had had, it is true, to face the temptation to go back to his old surroundings, remorseful, to be sure, but still clinging to his own individuality. He had met that temptation, and he had overcome it.

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The other — that of making a weak atonement by suicide—in the depths of the night, all alone with himself the murderer, he had had also at times to face. But fortunately that had never taken any vital hold upon him. His nature was too fundamentally sane for suicide, or else he was too brave, or else again he was too stubborn. He had a sort of stiff, inflexible, fierce spirit of courage which rose up always in sharp revolt whenever the devils of hopelessness sought to crush him against the walls of despair. There is an old darky song, narrating at some length the incidents in connection with the building and setting forth of the Ark. In this it is related of the ant that as it went up the gang-plank in company with the rest of the animals it turned with spirit upon the elephant and demanded, "Who you shovin'?" Which remark one cannot but feel showed a certain dare-devil courage and individuality on the part of the insect. There was something of this spirit in Page Emlyn's make-up. A devil of courage which rose always within him to demand as it were of Fate, "Who you shovin'?"

Moreover, he possessed as well a certain high allegiance to life. He had always believed that it was a great and glorious state of being, and very well worth while. And now because disaster had overtaken him, for him to commit suicide would, he felt, have been a comment upon life unpardonably disloyal. This attitude of his was perhaps best expressed in the epigram —

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"A ship-wrecked sailor buried on this coast,  
Bids you set sail.  
Full many a gallant bark when we were lost  
Weathered the gale."

Also after a little while his spirit and zest for existence began once more to reassert themselves, and to come to the support of his philosophy. Which was undoubtedly a very fortunate thing, for there are few enough philosophies which can hold their own, unsupported by nature. In his heart he was convicted of murder, and in consequence his own career was shattered. Very well, there was the black realization — very black and very terrible certainly — but over against it was his own naturally courageous spirit. There were, as well, all the innumerable warm and sunnily pleasant little happenings that go to the cheerful make-up of every-day life; and in spite of himself, the murderer, he seized gratefully and eagerly upon all these genial events. He would not let the black shadow come an inch beyond his own personality. He would not! He would not! He would not! It was the devil of stubbornness crying out in him, or perhaps — perhaps, it was God's angel of courage speaking through him.

He had slipped very easily and naturally into the life of Willoughby, almost as though he had never known any other. From Mrs. Calvert he had bought James' rather meagre store of office furnishings and books, to which he had added his own supply from Cincinnati. He had even rented the office which had belonged to the dead man, establishing himself in

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the very room that had been accustomed to James Calvert's loud voice, his laugh, his views upon life, his big physical atmosphere, in fact to all his familiar make-up of personality. Nay more, after a struggle with himself, Emlyn had asked Mrs. Calvert to take him as a boarder, having two reasons for doing so. In the first place, he guessed easily enough that in the very straightened circumstances of the family any addition to their meagre income would be welcome. In the second place, he knew that he could carry out his intention of playing the part of James Calvert in regard to his family more easily if he took up his abode in the same house with them.

James had had no partner in his business, and Emlyn, seeing another way to be of assistance, had gone to Mrs. Calvert and offered to buy the good-will of her son's law practice, trusting that she would be no exception to the average woman as far as a general knowledge of business went. Mrs. Calvert had never heard of the sale of a lawyer's good-will, but Emlyn's manner of putting it was so natural and matter of course that she supposed it was the accustomed mode of procedure, and gladly accepted his very generous offer. Also, after inquiries made about him through Judge Rymal, who had friends in Cincinnati, she placed the general winding up of James' affairs in Emlyn's hands.

There was no very great difficulty about the leading of James Calvert's life. His love for Hester Rymal, his law, his land deals, and looking after his family, had made up the sum of it. He had never interested

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himself particularly in politics. He had been wont to say that it was a dirty game which a man was best out of. Neither had he had any especial taste, nor in fact, time, for philanthropy. Therefore, his home and his office held all of the dead man's life that it was possible for Page Emlyn to take upon himself.

There had been a lack of enthusiasm, and even a scarcely veiled hostility, in the attitude of the other lawyers of the place toward Emlyn's advent among them. In their opinion the legal pickings of Willoughby when divided up among six were scanty enough already, and the sudden arrival among them of a young and energetic lawyer from the city was far from inspiring them with any feelings of cordiality toward him. In the face of this tacit opposition, Emlyn had been very grateful for Judge Rymal's kind reception. The latter had gone out of his way to give Emlyn a welcome to Willoughby, and had constantly invited him to his house. For if the Judge liked you, he liked you, and if he didn't, he didn't; and he had never seen any reason in either case for concealing his feelings. Or, if he had seen a reason, he had certainly never troubled himself to act upon it. In obedience to the Judge's friendship and his kind offers of hospitality, Emlyn, since his coming to Willoughby, had been thrown constantly in Hester Rymal's society. He regarded her always as a being apart, set aside by her engagement to James Calvert, and enshrouded in his own mind in the cloud of his contrition and remorse. Yet he had not met her many times before there began to beat

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very deep within him, and as yet unknown even to himself, the pulse of another emotion in regard to her.

Emlyn had found also another friend in Mrs. Calvert. It was a difficult friendship for him to face, yet in the scheme of things which he had laid out for himself there could be no possibility of his avoiding it. Under other circumstances her friendship would have been very welcome to him, for her quiet and repressed, almost stern, personality interested him to an unusual degree. He realized that below her apparent coldness was a very volcano of suppressed emotion. He had first become aware of this when she had tried to express her gratitude to him for lending Eugene the money to complete his medical course. As she started to thank him, Emlyn had wondered vaguely at the constraint of her tone.

"I do not know how to thank you, Mr. Emlyn, it has always been Eugene's great desire to be a doctor," she had begun. "And it would —" she paused, and to his surprise Emlyn became suddenly aware that she was pressing her lips hard together to keep them from trembling. "And it would," she resumed, "it would have broken my heart if he had had to give it up." She turned her head away breathing quickly. And all at once he understood. Her wall of reserve was a defence erected against her own emotions, for the moment her words slipped below the surface of her reticence, it became impossible for her to voice them.

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Emlyn's compassion was sharpened by remorse almost to reverence, and he answered her quickly.

"Don't— don't speak of it," he said eagerly. "Please don't speak of it. I was glad — delighted to do anything I could — and it was nothing anyway."

She rose abruptly and went over towards the door, still keeping her face turned from him. There she paused.

"Thank you," she managed to get out, her voice cold with repression, as her hands groped for the handle. Emlyn sprang forward and opened the door for her and she passed out in silence. But he had had a glimpse below the surface, and knew the woman she was.

Poor Ann Calvert! Before she came into the valley she had been a gay and natural enough young girl, but little by little, stone by stone, she had built up her wall of reserve, because there was a fierce pride within her which refused to let the world hear her cry out, no matter how hard Fate might apply the thumbscrews.

Rather to his surprise Emlyn found his hands tolerably full of business, and his life fell naturally into its two centres, the office with all its general routine of work, and the Calvert household with the intimate home life which it involved. There were times when a terrible loathing toward his position seized him, and his heart cried out that it was an unspeakably horrible deception, impossible for him to carry out. But he put the feeling inflexibly from him, in the honest belief that he was making the only atonement that lay within

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one of his household gods feel more at home in its new surroundings. Presently the whistling ceased and Richard appeared at Emlyn's door.

"Say," he began hesitatingly, his eyes roving around the room, "can you lend me a few books?"

"Certainly," said Emlyn cordially, with a wave of his hand toward his very well-stocked shelves. "Take anything you like but the Code; I can't be separated from that just yet. I thought Ohio had a peculiar set of laws, but for anything wild and curious give me West Virginia."

"It's an all-right State though," said Richard, loyally. "It'll be first in coal and oil soon, and it's always first in the hearts of its countrymen — first, last, and all the time."

He crossed to the bookcase and looking over the stock critically chose some of the handsomest and newest volumes. It seemed to Emlyn that his selection was a rather random one.

"Any particular subject you wanted to read up on?" he asked, ready to offer suggestion.

"I've got a case," said Richard in a careless tone, his back turned as he still looked over the books.

"A case! Oh, good for you!" cried Emlyn, heartily. Being only thirty-two himself, it did not require a great stretch of his memory to recall his own excitement over his first case. "What kind of a case is it?" he continued. "Can I help you in any way about it?"

"Much obliged," said Richard, "you can help me a whole lot, and I appreciate your offer like everything."



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He turned to go, the pile of volumes balanced carefully on one arm. "You see," he said, opening the door, "the case happens to be a brand-new bookcase and" — he passed across the threshold — "these volumes will help to fill it up a lot," and with the words he fled.

"Well, doggone him!" Emlyn commented to himself, with a laugh for Richard's exploit, and another whimsical one over his own natural falling into the valley phraseology.

In a moment his door opened again, this time to admit George Haymer. He came into the room unembarrassed, and after the customary "Howdy," he seated himself in a chair placed within convenient expectorating range of the stove door, which fortunately happened to be open.

"I jest come in ter let you know I got them calls on the Sweet Run tract located all right at last," he said.

Emlyn had set him upon the track of the fifty missing acres.

"I can show you over 'em any day you fix now. I don't know how me and James come ter git so mixed up on 'em," he continued. "I wouldn' er thought there was any fifty acres in the whole county that could er slipped away from me like that. But I've got 'em back into the pen all right now, an' I reckon they won't git away from us agin in er hurry."

He paused, looking around the office sociably.

"Well, I'll be doggoned if you don't seem ter be right at home here," he said.

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Emlyn had met George Haymer the first time after that fateful afternoon with something of fear. How much would he remember? And even if he were afraid on his own account to make his suspicions known to the public, might he not try to threaten Emlyn in secret with them? But Haymer's mind was apparently an entire blank as to the whole calamity. He remembered certainly that he had been drunk, but that he and Emlyn had had any grudge against James Calvert seemed to have slipped altogether from his memory. He had spoken of James in the highest terms, almost, in fact, affectionately, as a fellow that was certainly always nice to do business with. He had not appeared to be surprised at Emlyn's advent, and he had done his part to welcome him to the valley.

"I'm glad ter see you come in here," he had said, "you're right smart of er gentleman, an' any time I kin do er turn for you, I'd be glad ter know about it. I like you anyhow," he went on, expanding, "but it gives yer er sort of friendly feelin' for er fellar ef you've jest been drunk er time or two with him — you don't feel like strangers no more. An' you certainly did take yer licker like er gentleman," he added.

"I took it like a beast!" Emlyn had answered involuntarily and sharply, the compliment being scarcely a welcome one.

"Well, now, I don't know but what you're jest about right after all," Haymer returned, for he was usually ready to fall in line with the other man's opinion. "There certainly is er heap of truth in what yer say,

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an'," he had the virtuous affrontery to add, "I ain't so very keen about er fellar who gits drunk myself."

"I come acrost Mr. Joe Beaks nosin' about in the woods while I was prospectin' around for the E. G. tree," Haymer resumed on the present occasion. "I kinder think he's tryin' to git his finger into that Sweet Run pie, but maybe he wa'n't," he added tolerantly. "Maybe he was jest havin' a look over that Calvert tract — all the fellars takes er day off onct in er while an' goes up in there an' licks their chops over it."

"The Calvert tract?" Emlyn questioned, attracted by the name.

"Huh — huh, it's about the richest tract in this here whole county, an' I reckon if it jest laid different it would be wurth most anything er fellar chose to ask for it. All the tracts round it's been cut over so many times that there ain't scarcely timber enough left on any one of 'em to make good-sized cheer-spindles. An' all the time there's that Calvert tract settin' back there gettin' richer every year. It ain't been teched fer — well, really now, I don't believe it's *ever* been teched. An' there's oak trees on it I *know* must be over two hundred years old."

"Then why don't the Calverts sell it?" inquired Emlyn. "Haven't they had good offers for it?"

"Sell it?" said Haymer. "Well, I reckon they'd sell it quick enough if it wa'n't for old Uncle Billy Chester."

"Why, what's he got to do with it?" asked Emlyn.

"Why, him an' old Colonel Calvert had er fallin' out

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about somethin' er other er long while back, an' Uncle Billy always lowed he'd git even with the Calverts. But I reckon the Colonel never thought nothin' about it till there come er buyer for that tract, an' then come to find out Uncle Billy'd bought up all the land about there, wherever there was er outlet to the railroad er the river, an' nothin' would make him give the old Colonel the right of way ter his timber. So there's that tract settin' back there an' so tied up by Uncle Billy that none er the buyers will tech it. James tried ter git round the old man onct, but I reckon he didn't go about it right; anyhow, someway ernuther, what he said made Uncle Billy madder than he was erfore. So James had to let it go too, an' reckon he lowed jest ter set back an' wait till the old man was dead an' then come ter terms with the heirs."

"How big a tract is it?" said Emlyn.

"Oh, long about three thousand acres, maybe er little less," Haymer returned.

"Why, it ought to be worth a fortune!" Emlyn exclaimed.

"Well, it ain't wurth nothin' with Uncle Billy settin' there on it," said Haymer.

"How old is he?"

"Who, Uncle Billy? He's up in the eighties — but he lows he's sort er got into the habit er livin' now an' he don't b'lieve he could quit if he tried, so the Calverts needn't ter calculate too much on that. It's a funny mix-up," he added, rising to go, "an' I reckon there's been more'n one time that the Calvert folks

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wished they'd stayed on the good side of Uncle Billy."

Left alone in his office Page Emlyn's mind took hold eagerly upon the thought of the Calvert's tract.

Suppose he could manage to get the rights of way from old Uncle Billy, and then could sell the timber for them — why, as timber lands were selling now, it would mean a comfortable income for Mrs. Calvert for the rest of her life.

## CHAPTER XV

### JAMES CALVERT'S MOTHER

TIME dragged slowly on through the slush and snow and mud of winter, and at last, toward the end of February, Emlyn had the deal for the Sweet Run tract of land completed. Besides the commission which came to him for the sale of the land, and which he hoped to persuade Mrs. Calvert to accept, he had got out of the transaction as well the hatred of Josiah Beaks. It was characteristic of Beaks that he looked upon every event of life in the light of how it might affect him, and he had seen in the death of James Calvert an opportunity to do a little business on his own account. With this thought in view he had gone to the owner of the Sweet Run tract — technically known in the valley as a party — and the party in this case being a woman, had found no great difficulty in persuading her that the option which she had already given to James Calvert on the land, had of course expired with the latter's death, and in securing a fresh one for himself. Thereafter he opened energetic negotiations with a Charleston company, and had not Emlyn been warned in time, it is possible that the Rich Creek Lumber Company and the Charleston firm would suddenly

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have found themselves purchasers of one and the same tract of timber — a fact which would doubtless have surprised everybody concerned very much indeed, except Mr. Josiah Beaks. He would not have been surprised, and he would not have minded the other people's surprise, so long as he had his commission safely in pocket. Emlyn had been warned, however, both by George Haymer and by Richard Breeze, that there was reason to suppose that Josiah needed watching, and after a little investigation he was able to discover and successfully frustrate the other's stratagem. He had also succeeded in making Josiah very angry.

"You're smart all right, Mr. Page Emlyn, but I'll get ahead of you yet!" Beaks had said, his little blond face mottled all over with spots of angry colour.

"Oh no, I'm not smart," Emlyn had returned without heat — the other struck him as being too insignificant to provoke his anger. "No, I'm not smart, but *you* are extraordinarily stupid."

"You're smart all right!" Beaks had returned again, too infuriated to be aware that he was repeating himself. "But you can't come up in here an' grab *all* the business away from us other fellars without gettin' yourself into trouble — an' the sooner you find that out the better it'll be for you!"

After which Josiah took his departure, banging the door behind him, and Emlyn knew that he had won the animosity of one man at least of the valley. At first he was only triumphant and amused over his victory. But though he could fight, and fight hard in the

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excitement and heat of the game, and could be healthily exultant when he won, there always came to him afterwards, with the cooling of his anger, a feeling of disgust that it should have been necessary. His sense of loyalty to life went hand in hand with a certain feeling of respect for his fellow human beings. And whenever the smallness and triviality of humanity asserted themselves the revelation had a drearily depressing effect upon him, shooting for the time being a drab shadow over his whole outlook. Certainly there was nothing inspiring in Josiah Beaks as an enemy, and moreover his attempted scheme had so involved the technicalities of the option on the land that the sale of the Sweet Run timber was of necessity deferred for a time, and Emlyn could not but feel that when fifty acres casually lost themselves, and when Josiah Beaks was always on the lookout for anything he might snap up, the turning over of real estate in West Virginia presented many unusual difficulties.

There came a day, however, when a letter from the Rich Creek Lumber Company assured him that the sale was at last successfully completed, and that afternoon, when in the early winter twilight he prepared to close his office for the night, he felt that he had accomplished at least one step in the living of James Calvert's life. He pulled down the roller top of his desk with a slam of satisfaction, looked to see that the fire in the stove had burnt to a discreet lowness, and then, drawing his office door to and locking it behind him, he started homeward. In the hallway of the building, however,



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he encountered Richard Breeze and paused a moment for friendly conversation with him. The latter had rather a festive and well-brushed air, evidenced particularly by a fresh new necktie.

"Oh," said Emlyn, "going to call on some of the girls this evening?"

Richard assented cheerfully. "That's the calculation," he returned without shyness.

"Well, look here," said Emlyn, enthusiastically, as one struck by a sudden inspiration; "why don't you drop in for a little while at Mrs. Calvert's? It seems an age since we saw anything of you — why, only this morning at breakfast Miss Dolly said, 'What *do* you suppose Richard Breeze is doing with himself? Why, it just seems a *hundred* years since we saw him.'"

"Yes, I reckon that's just about what she *did* say," Richard returned, with a grinning skepticism. He liked Page Emlyn very much indeed, in his secret heart admiring him extravagantly, and all the former's teasing did not, as he himself would have expressed it, faze him one little bit. Moreover, indeed, Richard was in no way ashamed of his devotion to Dorothy Calvert, and he would not have cared in the least if the whole world had been aware that he spent most of his evenings at the Calvert house.

Page Emlyn walked quickly homeward through the cold twilight of the village street. He did not like the lonesomeness of dusk,—himself, the murderer, was too apt to come stalking out then and stare at him,—and he was glad when he reached at length the warmth

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and light of Mrs. Calvert's dining-room. There he found Hester Rymal seated at the supper table with Dolly and Mrs. Calvert.

Dolly was recovering something of her spring and joyousness, for it was now almost five months since her brother's death, and at eighteen five months is a long time; at that age, moreover, one cannot be forever overwhelmed by tragedy, especially if one's life is developing other and new phases of interest. She was indeed quite cheerful and almost gay at supper, and in her black dress with its white ruching at neck and wrists, her delicately fair face looked like a wondering, newly opened rose. Page thought her an exceptionally lovely little creature, and as the months passed he found himself growing very fond of her — the fondness of a quiet elder brother's attitude. He was not in the least in love with her, nor ever would be, but he would have done all in his power to save her from unhappiness, and he would have done so being utterly unaware that in the existing state of things, unhappiness was more likely to come to her through him than from any outside source—unaware with the perfect blind simplicity, almost stupidity, which sometimes possesses modest men.

Dorothy and Hester made pretty contrasts to one another; Dorothy so slight and fair and Hester stately and dark. Hester too that night was light-hearted and cheerful. For weeks after James Calvert's death she had felt her spirits enshrouded in a black pall of depression, and bowed down by her remorseful remembrance of their last night together.

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"O Aunt Rachel!" she had cried to Mrs. Crozier, "I can't seem to shake it off. I can't get rid of the idea that somehow it was my fault. It seems to me it would have been easier to bear if I had really loved him."

Mrs. Crozier knew that it was natural for youth to feel that way, and she did not pause to argue the point with Hester, though as she turned her afghan critically in her hands, she thought that, keen as the stab of remorse undoubtedly is, Hester, had she loved James Calvert, would have found bereavement a sharper thing still. She let the thought go, however, and took up another side of the question.

"And yet, you know," she said in her quiet voice, "you have got to shake off that feeling, Hester. It's no more right for you to let remorse cripple your usefulness and hold upon life that it would be for you to let any other emotion do it. It has been a very terrible thing for you, my child, but you have acted as you thought for the best, and now you *must* put the thought of it behind you. In my opinion it will be a form of selfishness if you do otherwise."

Her words had presented to Hester a new view of the situation, and she had seized upon the thought almost gladly, as no doubt Mrs. Crozier had hoped she would. It was a relief to feel that she must not face her remorse forever. And once let a girl of twenty-two believe that it is her duty to be happy, and youth will leap up joyously to accomplish that attitude of mind for her. Youth indeed is a wonderful thing, and Hester and Dolly and even Page Emlyn, touched that night

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

by its blessed spirit, all three threw off something of the sombre cloud that had settled upon them at James Calvert's death.

In the inspiration of one another's company and in the cheerful warm light of the dining-room, the supper went off with a gaiety and flow of spirits that the Calvert house had not known for many a long week. Hester and Emlyn united in drawing Dolly out and in making her the centre of conversation, and under their attentions and gentle teasing she dimpled and glowed and pouted, and was altogether very sweet and adorably young.

Yet for all their gaiety Hester became aware after a time of a chill in the atmosphere. Mrs. Calvert sat restrained and silent at the head of the table, and Hester caught herself wondering if her silence was one of grief altogether. The girl had a vague sense that there was a feeling of resentment in it as well. She wondered if their mirth jarred upon the older woman, and afterwards she tried to curb it a little.

Mrs. Calvert seemed to Hester very much changed by her son's death. She had always been a difficult person to know, constrained and apparently cold; but her reserve and coldness appeared to the girl to have grown upon her terribly since her affliction. It was only natural that this should be so, yet Hester experienced a dim fear that there was another sentiment as well combined with it — a certain hostility toward herself. With nothing tangible on which to base her convictions,

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she had, nevertheless, come to have always a sense of chill in the other's presence, a feeling that she was not welcome. She had been at the Calverts' house very frequently all winter, for since her brother's death, Dolly clung to her passionately, and insisted upon having her with her at every opportunity. But in spite of Dolly's devotion it was not long before Hester began to experience this feeling of a veiled repugnance toward herself on the part of Mrs. Calvert. She wondered often if the latter could by some chance have become aware of her broken engagement with James. Hester would have done almost anything in her power to save the other from pain, yet the honesty of her nature was such, that at times it seemed to her the situation would be more bearable if the real truth were known, than it was at present in the face of Dolly's tender and considerate devotion, bestowed upon her in the belief that she had been in love with James.

After supper Hester and Dolly went back into the parlour together. Emlyn opened the door and closed it after them, remaining himself in the dining-room with Mrs. Calvert.

"O Hester," Dolly said breathlessly when they were alone, "isn't he just *fine*?"

"Who?" said Hester, absently, her thoughts still dwelling upon Mrs. Calvert.

"Who!" cried Dolly, a deep rose flushing in her childish face. "Why, Mr. Emlyn, of course. O Hester, you can't *think* how kind he is to mother and me! A day doesn't go by without his doing something for us

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— he is *so* good!" Her eager words even brought tears of gratitude to her gentle eyes. "Don't you think he's nice too?" she insisted.

"Why, of course I do," said Hester, "I think he's very nice indeed." Yet for some reason which even she herself could not fathom, her voice was brisk and cold.

Dolly noted the constraint of her answer, and she had a quick stab of contrition. Putting her arm about the other's neck she whispered softly, "Hester, darling, you mustn't think I don't remember dear James too — I do! Oh, I do, all the time!"

At the words and touch Hester experienced a leap of sharp revolt. Dolly's sympathy was almost more than she could bear.

"Come," she said, turning away quickly, "let's go on with our sewing." They were making delicately sheer collars and cuffs for Dolly to wear on her black frocks, adorning them with dainty brier-stitching and hemming.

In the dining-room Page Emlyn had just told Mrs. Calvert of the completed sale of the Sweet Run tract. He always lingered with her a little while in the evening, telling her the news of the day. He had fallen into this habit at first because much of his business, having belonged to James Calvert, necessarily concerned her as well. And after a time it became an established custom. It was what he had always done with his own mother, and he supposed that James Calvert had made a practice of it also. As a matter of fact James had

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done nothing of the sort. He had been very good to his mother, very generous with his money, and very fiercely protective toward her, but his nature had lacked imagination, and he had been devoid of the slightest considerations for her. Moreover, he would have considered any discussions of business entirely outside of her sphere. He would have told her that business would only bore her, but in his heart of hearts he would have felt that his undertakings and plans were beyond her comprehension. That Page Emlyn should care to talk over his affairs with her, had been at first a great surprise to Mrs. Calvert, trained as she was to the indifference bestowed upon middle age, but after a time she came to look forward to these talks and to expect them. It gave colour and interest to her life, and brought her in touch as it were with the outer world.

"I am very glad we have this sale completed at last," Page was saying. "It has dragged along in a most annoying way, but now I hope in a few days to be able to turn over the commission to you."

"But I don't understand," said Mrs. Calvert. "Why should the commission come to me?"

"Why, it belongs to you of course," said Emlyn, "because the deal was practically completed by your son. It was only—" he paused; for the life of him he could not help stumbling over the words—"it was only his death that delayed it."

Mrs. Calvert, however, still demurred. "But you completed it," she said. "It seems to me the com-

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mission should really belong to you. Of course, however," she conceded, "being a woman, I don't really understand all the technicalities of these sales."

"Then you must believe me," Emlyn said, seizing quickly on her admission. "And I tell you that this really does belong to you. It is part of your son's estate," he added.

"Oh, if it belongs to his estate" — Mrs. Calvert wavered, turning the matter over consideringly, yet already half convinced.

"Yes — to his estate," said Emlyn, nodding his head in confirmation, and congratulating himself that he had been able to hit upon a trick of words to convince her.

"That, of course, would make it different," she admitted at last. She breathed a little sigh of relief; there was no denying to herself that the commission would do much toward lifting the load of debt which she still carried, and would make her immediate future more comfortable.

"I have been wondering, Mrs. Calvert," Emlyn went on; "if you would consider the selling of that big tract of timber of yours — the Calvert tract, don't they call it?"

"Yes, the Calvert tract," she assented. "Why, I should be very glad indeed to sell it, but I'm afraid, Mr. Emlyn, for the present that is almost an impossibility. You see both Colonel Calvert and my son tried to dispose of it at different times, but old Mr. Chester, who for some reason had a grudge against my father-in-law, has succeeded in securing all the outlets to it,



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and it seems that without his good-will the tract is practically useless. So I fear there is really nothing to do except wait for his death. You know people in that class are often very unreasonable, and quite impossible to deal with once they have conceived a dislike toward any one." Mrs. Calvert had been a Virginian before her marriage, and in spite of her thirty years in the democratic atmosphere of West Virginia, she still clung to her ideas of class distinction.

"Well, with your permission, I shall try what can be done with the old man," Emlyn returned. "It ought to be a valuable piece of property, and at present there is a great demand for timber land in this section of the State, — a decided boom in fact. How long it will last, of course nobody can say." He rose to leave the room.

"Mr. Emlyn," Mrs. Calvert began impulsively, though her eyes were still bent over the sewing she had taken up, "I want you to know that Dolly and I — all of us in fact — are continually grateful to you for all your kindness and thoughtfulness."

With time she had lost a little of her constraint in his presence, and was able to express herself more easily.

"Oh, don't —" Emlyn began almost sharply.

"I — I think," she said, a little falter in her voice, "that the people we have lost must sometimes be near us, and I am sure it is a — a comfort to my son to know that we have found such a kind friend in you." She raised her eyes gratefully to him.

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Emlyn's face went very grey suddenly, but he managed to keep his voice steady, and she was not aware of anything unusual in his manner.

"Mrs. Calvert," he said, "I am very glad and happy to do what I can for any of you, and I hope you will always call on me. What I have done is certainly nothing as compared to the kindness you have shown in taking me — a stranger — in," and with the words he turned hastily to the door and went out before she could speak again.

In the hall he stood still a moment facing the realization of remorse which her words had called up. He had supposed that with time he would become hardened and more used to the situation, but instead every day seemed to make it more impossible. Could he stand it? he asked himself sharply. Was it possible for him to keep up the part he played? Yet his determination rose quickly and answered him with vehemence. Yes, it was possible! Of course it was possible! If he kept it up he was able to help a little the people whom he had so terribly injured. The situation was awful — almost indeed, unendurable; yet, he cried to himself with fierce intolerance, what right had he to consider his own feelings any more? Bear it? *Of course* he could bear it!

As he passed through the hall a knock came at the outer door. Emlyn guessed well enough who it was, and turning determinately away from the revolt of his own emotions, he went over to the door and flung it open.

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The dim light from the swinging lamp in the hall revealed the figure of Richard Breeze stamping the snow from his feet on the porch mat.

"Why," cried Emlyn, "Mr. Breeze of all people! Come in! Come in! Dear me, this is a surprise!"

It was a trivial enough jest, but Emlyn caught at any jest no matter how trivial, and flung it defiantly in the face of the secret devils that leered at him.

Richard entered, bringing with him a crisp freshness from the chill night air without, his cheeks as bright as his tie.

"Well, try and bear up under the surprise," he said cheerfully; "for it may happen again almost any night before the winter's over."

Emlyn turned to the parlour door and flung it open.

"Ladies," he announced, "Mr. Richard Breeze."

"Why, hello, Dicky!" said Hester, cordially. She was very fond of him in a cousinly way.

"O Richard," said Dolly, indifferently, and held out her little careless hand in greeting. Richard was very nice, of course, and she would certainly have missed his attentions. But then, dear me, who was he anyway but just Richard Breeze whom one had known all one's life?

The parlour looked very cosy and attractive with its open fire, its centre table, and the two girls busy with their work, the light from the lamp shining upon the dark head and the fair one.

"Won't you join us, Mr. Emlyn?" Dolly said. "I'm sure you haven't any work to do to-night." Her man-

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ner was very pretty in its assumption of formality. She always seemed to Emlyn like a child playing at being grown up.

"Thank you," he said and smiled at her. A little scrap of the thin white stuff she was at work on had slipped to the floor, and as he handed it back to her their hands met for a fleeting instant. It did not affect him in the very least, so how was he to know that she thrilled all over at his touch?

"O Hester," said Dolly, feeling her responsibility as hostess; "won't you sing something for us? Please do — I haven't heard you sing since you went away."

"Yes, Cousin Hester, do — there's a good girl. My musical education has been mightily neglected in the last few weeks," said Richard.

Emyn also added his entreaties to the rest. Hester did not feel inclined to sing. She had a half-defined idea that Mrs. Calvert, sitting alone in the dining-room with her grief, would resent the sound of music. Yet after all it was only a vague idea, and since Dolly had asked it she could not well refuse.

"Very well, Cousin Richard," she said, giving his shoulder a pat as she passed on her way to the piano; "I should like to do all I could for your education."

"That's right, Hester," Richard returned heartily; "it needs all the help it can get."

Hester's voice was not particularly remarkable perhaps, but it was very full and sympathetic. She sang two or three simple little songs, not hilarious ones, and yet not ones that were sad. Emlyn sat looking

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deep into the fire as he listened. In some mysterious way her singing loosed the best and strongest that was in him; he felt the weary difficulty of his remorse and of his position relax a little and slip into the background of his mind, the while a certain confidence and peace took hold upon him — a trustfulness that if he did what he believed to be right, that was the most that could be required of him, and he might then rest in tranquillity. It seemed to shift, as it were, the solitary responsibility for himself on to larger and broader shoulders, and as he followed the music dreamily, he came into a little removed place of peace, where his thoughts found rest and strength. It was a renewal of his trust in the general scheme of the universe — a taking off of his hat, as it were, and an entering into the presence of his Creator. It quieted and reassured him, and gave him a sense that there was something larger and greater than himself in the world, something that would take his broken beginnings in the right direction, and would carry them to completion, or show him how to complete them; something which would, moreover, take his transgressions and visit the consequences of them upon his head. And strange as it may seem, the thought of possible punishment gave him also its sense of strength and peace. It was all a feeling of something beyond him, which would reward or punish him according to his acts, the while it carried out always its own inexorable plan.

During the singing Dolly stole little shy glances from time to time at Emlyn. Glances which she blushed

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for, being very well aware of Richard's devoted gaze fixed upon herself. Dear me! Given a piano, an open fire, and a few young people, what an entanglement of sentiment immediately results!

Hester stood up at last amid the applause of her small audience.

"I am going in to sit with your mother for a little while, Dolly, before I go home," she said. She had come to a sudden determination to make an effort to discover, if possible, if Mrs. Calvert really objected to having her at the house, or if it were all merely imagination on her own part: and in spite of a protest of "Oh, don't leave us," from Dolly, she passed through into the dining-room.

She and Mrs. Calvert had not been alone together since James Calvert's death. Hester wondered if this were chance or deliberate intention on the older woman's part.

At her entrance Mrs. Calvert put down the paper she was reading—it was the *Willoughby News*—and looked up inquiringly.

"What is it, a glass of water?" she asked.

"No, nothing," said Hester. "I just thought I'd come in and talk to you a little while before I go home."

As she spoke it seemed to the girl that Mrs. Calvert made a faint passionate gesture as though of protest. If it were so, however, she did not voice it, but laid her paper quietly upon the table and drew her mending basket toward her.

"Take that chair over there," she said, nodding to a

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deep rocker; "I think it is more comfortable." Her voice was deep and even and repressed.

Hester drew the chair up to the open fire and sat down in it. It was the same one in which she had sat the evening of James Calvert's death, when she had been so cold, and when Page Emlyn had wrapped Mrs. Calvert's shawl around her and had stirred the fire into a blaze. The remembrance of it all rushed back upon Hester sharply and kept her silent for a moment.

Mrs. Calvert bent intently over her pile of mending and said nothing.

The supper table was cleared now and spread with a red cloth for the night. The kerosene lamp upon it threw a bright circle of light over everything, and fell sharply upon the older woman's thin face and faded blond hair. Hester felt that the atmosphere was tense, and all at once she knew, with some quick sub-conscious instinct, that she had not been wrong in suspecting a hostility toward herself on Mrs. Calvert's part, and with the realization she felt an eager desire to leave her. It seemed cruel to thrust her unwelcome presence upon the other. Yet she had said she had come to sit a little while, and there seemed no adequate excuse as yet for her departure. In the parlour she could hear the steady murmur of voices, with Richard's occasional laugh; while from the kitchen at the back came the clatter of dishes being washed. Only in the dining-room itself was silence. The fire burnt faintly upon the hearth, and the clock ticked upon the mantelpiece, and that was all. She and the other woman were caught in

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one of the tense still places of the world. She could think of nothing to say, and yet she could not sit on forever in silence. Mrs. Calvert made no effort to start the conversation. She seemed entirely concerned with her sewing. Her profile was turned to the girl, and her thin firm lips were pressed hard against each other.

All at once there came a diversion from without; footsteps approached along the hall from the kitchen, and, pushing the door open, Nancy Virginia — Mrs. Calvert's coloured cook and maid of all work — entered, bearing a big grey stone crock wrapped about with a white cloth.

"Hit's so col' in de kitchen, Mis' Calvert, I jest lowed I'd set my bread in here fer ter-night ef you don't keer," she said, and so saying she placed the crock upon the high old-fashioned mantelpiece. "I'll jest set it up here fer de present, an' den when you goes to bed, ef you please, m'em, jest put hit down on de hearth, an' dat way I 'spect hit'll raise all right."

"Very well," Mrs. Calvert returned; "good-night."

"Good-night, Nancy Virginia," Hester said too. "That was mighty pretty bread you gave us for supper."

The black woman went out giggling and ducking her head in appreciation. "Law, chile, dat ain't nothin' to what I *kin* make. Good-night ter yer all, I hope yer'll res' good to-night."

It seemed to Hester that the little homely interruption had cleared the atmosphere somewhat, and made natural conversation more possible.



## JAMES CALVERT'S MOTHER

"It is hard this cold weather to find a good place to put the bread," she said. "Cousin Lizzie has a dreadful time with ours."

Mrs. Calvert did not reply at once. She turned the mending in her hands.

"Nancy Virginia has had some trouble too," she conceded at length briefly.

Hester felt the same terrible repression stealing back upon her, yet she made a determined effort to throw it off.

"Hasn't it been cold this week?" she went on. "Yesterday morning all the plants we were trying to save through the winter were frosted, and I'm afraid even the roots are dead."

Mrs. Calvert made no effort to reply. She took up her spool of cotton and began unwinding a needleful of thread from it. But perhaps her hands trembled, at any rate the spool slipped through her fingers, and though she caught at it, it bounced to the floor and rolled away into one corner. Hester sprang to pick it up. How it happened she did not know, but as she started eagerly forward she brushed against Mrs. Calvert's work-basket, and sent it to the floor with a scattering crash of spools and buttons.

"Oh, how *stupid* of me!" cried Hester, aghast, yet with a little spasm of uncontrolled laughter as she beheld the completeness of the overturned basket. She stooped quickly and began gathering up the scattered materials.

"I'm so sorry," she said, raising her eyes to the other.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"I —" she broke off all at once. At the crash of the basket, Mrs. Calvert had leaped to her feet, and her tense repression seemed to have snapped suddenly. She towered above Hester, her thin face a white flame of passion.

"Go!" she cried in a hoarse shaken voice. "*Go!* You *sha'n't* stay to torment me! Oh —" She turned away, catching her breath and trying to control herself.

Hester rose quickly to her feet overwhelmed with astonishment. Yet the agitation of the other's manner calmed and steadied her.

"Mrs. Calvert, what do you mean? Why do you speak like that — what is it?" she demanded.

Mrs. Calvert turned back upon her fiercely. "Go!" she cried again, her tone deep and grating. "*Go! go!*" Her voice broke into silence.

Hester was not frightened. Hers was a strong nature, and in the face of excitement and calamity her best self rose always to her defence. She stood up very tall and very quiet before the other.

"Mrs. Calvert," she said, "what is the matter — you *must* tell me what it is — why you speak so?"

"*Why* I speak so — you have the face to stand before James Calvert's mother and ask me — *me*, his mother, *why* I speak so — you — you — you *murderer!*"

The words came rushing and stumbling over one another in their haste and passion to be uttered.

"*Murderer!*" cried Hester, stunned.

## JAMES CALVERT'S MOTHER

"Yes, murderer—*murderer!*" The other flung back, her words on the very heels of Hester's.

"Oh, do you think my son was a fool," she went on passionately; "was a baby — that he should slip over the Raven Rocks in broad daylight! Wasn't he strong — couldn't he see perfectly — couldn't he take care of himself? Oh, don't play to *me* that you think it was an *accident!*" Her words rushed on in shaken vehemence, but still her voice was low and repressed. From the other room came a snatch of laughter from Dolly, and in the kitchen Nancy Virginia was singing. Only there in the dining-room, shut away from the other life of the house, these two women looked into each other's faces.

"Of course it was an accident — what — what else *could* it be?" Hester whispered.

"*Accident!*" cried Mrs. Calvert, fiercely. She paused a moment catching her breath. Then she spoke quietly and her voice was almost dead. "James Calvert," she said, "committed suicide because Hester Rymal — the girl he had loved with his very soul all his life — threw his love aside."

"Oh no — *no!*" cried Hester, "Oh no — Mrs. Calvert, no!"

"Hush!" said the other woman sternly. "I thought at first," she went on, "that he must have been drunk — that in spite of everything I had done the Calvert curse had seized him in his despair. And when they told me he was sober I was glad and proud at first — proud that one Calvert had died free of the curse. But after-

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

wards I remembered how frantic he was, and what he told me when he came home from your house that night — and *then* I knew — I knew what must have happened. He was not drunk with whiskey — no — but he was drunk — *crazy* — with despair!”

“Oh, it can’t be so — it *can’t* be true!” cried Hester. She had sunk down in a chair by the table, burying her face in her hands. “Oh no — oh no,” she breathed.

Mrs. Calvert went on relentlessly. “Yes, you are sorry now,” she said, “now that it is too late. I wonder if you know what my son gave you. He gave you all his highest and noblest and tenderest thoughts — all the best that was in him — he gave you his very soul. Yes! And when you were through playing with it, you tossed it aside. And now you pretend to be surprised when I tell you he killed himself for love of you. Perhaps,” she said cruelly, “you even feel proud that he should have cared enough to have destroyed himself for your sake.”

Hester flung out her hands, “Ah-h, *don’t!*” she cried.

She rose slowly to her feet, and for a moment stood before the other woman in silence. “Mrs. Calvert,” she said at length, “I do not ask you to forgive me — I do not suppose you can, almost I do not want you to — only I want you to know that I thought I was doing what was the best for both of us, when I found out that I did not love him; and that now my very soul stands still in remorse.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Calvert, “I suppose you *are* sorry.

## JAMES CALVERT'S MOTHER

But will all the remorse in the world give me back my son — or change the fact that he sent himself into the next world because of you?"

Hester was silent for a long moment. "No," she said at length just above a whisper. She looked down at her hand, and then slowly she drew off the little engagement ring which she still wore. She had forgotten to return it to James that night, and afterwards she continued to wear it in remorseful remembrance. "Shall I give you this?" she said, holding the ring out to Mrs. Calvert.

The latter put out her hand quickly and took it, and for the first time the tears sprang into her eyes, hung on her lashes for a moment, and then rolled slowly down her cheeks. James' poor little simple ring, which for him had stood for the whole world, and for Heaven beside!

Yet she did not keep it.

"No," she said, "put it on and wear it — wear it! And every time you look at it, let it remind you that you destroyed James Calvert, body and soul."

There was no colour left in Hester's face, yet she reached out her hand steadily for the ring, and slipped it on with fingers that did not tremble.

Mrs. Calvert turned away to the fire, and taking up the tongs began mechanically putting the brands in place.

For a moment longer Hester stood looking at her, then she turned slowly toward the door and stumbled blindly from the room.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A NIGHT OF REVELATION

TREMBLING and shaken all over Hester stole very silently into the hall, and began as quietly as possible to slip into her out-of-door things. She had a horror that at any moment Dolly, or Richard, or Mr. Emlyn, might come out of the parlour and find her, and all her wild desire now was to escape alone into the cold stillness of the night, and to run, and run, and run, home to the seclusion of her own room.

With eager fingers she stooped down to pull on her rubbers, and even as she did so her heart gave a great bound, for the parlour door had opened.

It was Page Emlyn and he came into the dimly lighted hall and closed the door behind him, before he caught sight of Hester.

"Why, Miss Rymall!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Are you going home already?"

Hester did not speak, but with downcast eyes she nodded her head. It was all she could do to keep from crying out, and she was frantic to escape.

"I'll tell the others you are going," he said, turning back toward the parlour door.

"Oh, don't — *don't!*" Hester cried out desperately,

## A NIGHT OF REVELATION

involuntarily, her voice breaking over the words. And immediately her heart stood still in terror; surely he would wonder at her outburst, and would question her. She bent her head still lower over her rubbers.

Emlyn did not question her, however. At her words he looked at her in quick inquiry. Then he came over in silence, and kneeling down pushed the rubbers on for her.

But Hester's little burst of words had broken down the barriers of her self-control. She was shivering nervously all over, and her eyes were filling, filling, filling with tears; the salt taste of them was in her mouth. She bit her lips hard to keep them steady, and turned her face to one side, trusting to the shadow to hide her emotion. But suddenly one great tear brimmed over and rolling quickly down her cheek splashed upon Emlyn's hand. It felt to the man like a drop of fire, and on the instant touch of it his whole being leaped up in an overwhelming revelation.

"*Hester!*" he cried passionately, and sprang to his feet.

But with her woman's quickness, Hester saw and understood. She started erect and avoiding his outstretched arms turned hastily away. "My coat!" she cried breathlessly, blindly. "Oh, where *did* I put my coat!"

Emlyn was in a blaze of emotion and excitement, yet he still found strength to control himself. He held her coat for her, put her furs about her neck, and handed her her gloves and muff. He did not speak, but the blood ran through his veins like fire.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Still in silence he put on his own coat and hat, and opening the door passed out with her.

Hester had a frantic desire to cry out, to beseech him not to come with her. All she wanted was the stillness and quiet of the night, and to run like a hunted animal home to her own room. Yet she could not trust her voice, and in silence the two went out together into the night.

It was still and cold and very clear. There was no moon, but the starlight and the snow upon the ground made it very bright. The still cold gripped their throats and met their faces with a tingling vivacity.

Hester walked fast, almost breaking into a run, and Emlyn kept pace beside her.

"Hester!" he began again eagerly, passionately.

But she cut him short. "Oh, don't — don't," she cried in agitation, "don't speak to me! I want to get away — I want to be alone —" She stopped, her words choked into silence.

Emlyn steadied himself to answer quietly. "I cannot let you go home alone," he said.

Afterwards they went on in silence, keeping to the little beaten track by the side of the road. The scattered houses set back in their respective front yards seemed to stare at them from their yellow-lighted windows, and occasionally here and there a dog barked as they went by. At last the outskirts of the village were behind them, and they struck into the deserted half mile of country road leading out to the Rymals' farm. On either side of them the blue-white fields



## A NIGHT OF REVELATION

in their covering of snow stretched silently away to the mountains, the black fences cutting across them in sharp outline. In the distance the mountains rose up dark and mysterious against the sky. They seemed very silent and hushed, and perhaps out there, under the great wide peaceful sweep of the night, they were looking up to God and saying their prayers.

Away at the foot of the Shadow Mountains a train went heavily past, pushing its way up the steep grade of the track. Once it whistled sharply, and the shriek of it leaped across the remoteness of the night, and lost itself among the far-away hollows of the mountains.

Side by side Page Emlyn and Hester Rymal walked in silence. Their breath came and went in silver threads, and their footsteps fell with a sharp creak on the dry cold of the snow.

Hester dared not speak. She could not trust her voice, and her whole being was concentrated upon the determination to keep herself from breaking down. All she desired was the respite of solitude, in which to meet this terrible revelation and find some courage to bear it.

Emlyn walked with all his being caught in the white illumination that the touch of Hester's hot tear upon his hand had brought him. The touch of it acted like a sudden search-light, flashing into the very inmost recesses of his soul, and showing him the hidden truth that was there. And as he went along he seemed to himself to be actually walking in the blinding flare of it. His heart was on fire with life, but his brain

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

and his senses were almost giddy with the sudden revelation.

For the moment he was conscious of nothing save that he loved Hester Rymal — loved her with an intensity of passion that he had never dreamed it was possible for him to experience. He was aware of no apprehensions for the future, no realization of the past, no terrors for the present. He did not even desire to speak to Hester, nor to touch her, all he wanted was stillness and a space of peace and reverence in which he might absorb the great, wonderful knowledge that had come to him.

So they walked in silence, Page Emlyn with the great truth of his love looking at him with eyes of poetry and imagination; and Hester facing the terrible thing which Mrs. Calvert had thrust upon her.

Not far from the Rymals' front gate a shallow creek runs across the road. It is not much more than a thread of water, yet it is wide enough to necessitate a little low bridge for pedestrians. On this evening the creek was frozen across, yet the ice was not thick enough to bear, and when they came to it, Hester stepped mechanically on to the bridge. It was covered with frozen ice and snow, and was slippery. Hester was walking carelessly, her eyes too full of slow tears to see her way, and as she came almost to the end of the bridge she stumbled over a frozen footprint, slipped, caught her balance, slipped again, and at last plunged off and down into the snow.

She was not really hurt, but the shock of the fall,

## A NIGHT OF REVELATION

coming on top of everything else, tore away the last shreds of her self-control, and as she fell she gave a sharp cry — almost a shriek — and collapsing in a little heap upon the snow she burst into wild tears.

Leaping down beside her, Emlyn flung his arms around her.

“Darling! Darling, are you hurt?” he cried. Then suddenly he went quite mad out there in the white lonesomeness of the night.

“My own, my dearest — my beautiful!” he cried, and covered her face with passionate kisses.

The touch of his arms about her, his lips upon her brow, waked Hester from the dazed aloofness of her own misery, and struggling free of his embrace she sprang to her feet.

“Don’t!” she cried with a breathless sob. “Oh, don’t — *don’t!*” Her hands warded him off wildly, and turning she began to run along the narrow beaten track toward home. She was miserable from the horror of Mrs. Calvert’s accusation, and startled and surprised by Page Emlyn’s sudden passion; yet as she ran, in spite of her unhappy remorse, in spite of her surprise and haste, somewhere deep within her, the pulse of a new feeling was beginning to beat with a choking excitement.

Emlyn followed her quickly, but now, all at once, a cold chill was stealing over the spirit of his love. The dead face of James Calvert had risen suddenly out of the past to stare at him, and when at length they came breathlessly to the porch of Judge

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Rymal's house, he had come back to himself, back to his remorse, back to his own dead life.

On the steps he took off his hat and held out his hand.

"Forgive me," he said, "forgive me! I saw you were unhappy, and I — I was carried out of myself; please forgive me."

In the faint light Hester could not see the expression of his face, but his voice was old and weary and remote.

For a moment she was silent and the pulse of happiness which had begun to beat faintly within her stopped suddenly. Perhaps she, too, had seen the face of James Calvert.

At length she spoke.

"I will forgive you," she said — "I will try to forgive you."

But she did not take his outstretched hand, and turning away, she opened the front door and was gone. Afterwards, in her own little room, she was alone at last with herself, and with all that the evening had brought to her.

As Emlyn walked home through the cold silence of the night, the vast stillness of it all seemed crushing him to earth under the weight of a great loneliness.

He realized that something greater and stronger than he had ever known had been born within him that night, and the leap and strength of it terrified him. Terrified him because he did not know whether or not he had the power to resist it. He seemed somehow very

## A NIGHT OF REVELATION

hard-pressed and very aloof from any help or sympathy.

"Oh, it's a lonesome world!" he cried sharply and bitterly to himself, pausing a moment with the great cold stretches of the sky above him. Yet afterwards he added, "God help me!" in a half-involuntary whisper. Then he went steadily on his way again.

As he entered the Calverts' front hall, Dolly came eagerly out of the parlour.

"Why, what made Hester slip off like that?" she asked.

"I don't know exactly," he returned, "but I don't think she was well — she seemed — unhappy."

The tears sprang into Dolly's eyes.

"Oh, the poor, poor darling!" she cried. "Oh! Mr. Emlyn, I don't believe she ever forgets dear James for a single moment, and yet she is *so* brave! You know," she added simply, her blue childish eyes raised to his; "she and James were going to be married; that little ring she wears was his engagement ring."

Emlyn paused a moment. He felt as though he could not breathe, and the blood rushed giddily through his head.

"I know," he said at length quietly, and passing her, he went on up the steps to his own room.

## CHAPTER XVII

### TANGLED WEBS

THE practice of deceiving, we are told, only results in a hopelessly tangled web. And the less accustomed we are to the game the more tangled, in all probability, will the weaving become, the more impossible to carry on; for to evade the truth successfully, requires an infinite amount of ingenuity and much experience.

Page Emlyn was not an experienced player at the game. He had thought his position in Calvert's Valley a sufficiently difficult one already, but how difficult it might become, he had had no conception until after that white star-light and snow-light night, when love had stooped suddenly out of the great universe and seized him in its clutches.

He loved Hester Rymal with all the fire of his heart, and in the grip of his passion there were times when his pulses stood still in fear. It was such a new, such an unlooked for, such an overwhelming thing. Suppose he forgot again — as he had forgotten on that night — forgot the past, and stretching out eager hands, laid hold upon the possibilities of the magnificent present.

The arrogant leap of his own love left him no room

## TANGLED WEBS

to doubt the possibility of his making Hester love him in return. He *knew* that he could do it! Then suppose he forgot — forgot himself the murderer, himself the half-dead artificial being who lived another man's life — and suddenly, gloriously, joyously, remembered his own old self, Page Emlyn the free and happy — Page Emlyn who loved Hester Rymal! And it was all so easy to forget! There was no one save himself to remember the awful past. He might so easily give up his foolish play of being James Calvert — for at times now it seemed to him only foolish and useless — and abandoning his attempted atonement take back again his own old life. And if he did so, who in all the world would be any the wiser? There was the edge to his temptation — the fatal ease of it.

Then, too, it was a great astonishment to him to find that Page Emlyn was still alive, still desirous after all of living his own life, rather than that pretence at a life to which he had dedicated himself. In the sharpness of his remorse it had not been very difficult for him to let go of his own career — not impossibly difficult that is. The difficulty had come afterward in his having to face daily the falseness of his position, brought home to him as it was, so sharply in the Calverts' constant gratitude. But now suddenly his own old self was alive. Keenly, vibrantly alive, and fighting to regain its own again, to shake off that artificial personality, half James Calvert and half Page Emlyn, into which it was cramped. His own life and his own love, that was the sharp desire. And how sharp it was Page Emlyn alone knew.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

In all the renunciations of life man's own rebellious self is forever springing up with a leap of mocking laughter just at the surest moments — just when one supposes it most safely overlaid by resignation.

In the days and weeks which followed his night of revelation, Emlyn set himself to face down the temptation, and keep himself true to his purpose. And this he accomplished, though he did so only through fierce devotion to his work. He avoided Hester as faithfully as it was possible for him to do. Yet try as he would, they seemed to be meeting incessantly, as though some perverse devil of fate drove him forever across her path. To be sure he no longer met her at the Calverts' as he had done through the early winter. Hester had not, in fact, been inside the house since that decisive evening. But if he did not meet her there, there seemed a hundred other places where they were always encountering one another, as needs must be in so small a place. But indeed without a sight of her, Emlyn's heart would have found no difficulty in keeping her image in sharp remembrance. In the midst of his closest attention to business, the tones of her voice, certain little soft inflections, or peculiar phrases of hers, would come wandering unexpectedly forth from his inner consciousness to fall tantalizingly upon his mental ear. Or again, the peak that her dark hair made upon her brow, the slender grace of her figure, the delicate colour in her cheeks, or the grey of her eyes with their dark lashes, would dance before his mind's eye, making him set his teeth hard, and fight



## TANGLED WEBS

with all the passion of his soul against the temptation which these visions of his memory called forth.

The winter wore slowly away, and after many a pause and seeming backward glance over its shoulder at the season it was leaving, the year burst forth at last into the full glory of May. Calvert's Valley drew in its breath in deep waves of perfume, and all up and down the hills ran a sheen of tender effulgent green. The birds sang in the warm fragrant sunshine, and they sang as well in the soft mist of the spring showers, ruffling their feathers up around their necks and choking every now and again on a raindrop. And for a little while, all the world came to rest in the sweet belief that the universe was made for love and spring and happiness.

In the serenity of the blue spring weather, Hester Rymal went forth to work in the fragrant brown promise of the earth of her own little garden, sowing her seeds, and thinking her thoughts, and praying her prayers, without the vicar or anyone else to give her help. And many of her seeds went into their furrows, and many of her meditations, and possibly some of her prayers as well, went softly by to the thought of Page Emlyn. Hester was honest to the very foundations of her nature. With the undeniable revelation that Page Emlyn loved her had come another, sharper, truth—the knowledge that she loved him. At first, confronted by Mrs. Calvert's terrible accusation, in her remorse and horror, she had turned blindly away from all thought of love or happiness for herself. For truly what right had she

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

to love, she who, it seemed, had already destroyed one man? In the dreary winter months, during which she had much time to remember the scene with Mrs. Calvert, and to take the horror of it home to the very depths of her soul, Hester had come to the verge of a morbid conception of herself; a feeling that she was a being unwholesome and monstrous, a creature who blighted all that came near it; that her love, and the love of her, was a rank, destroying poison. Moreover there came too a frightened distrust of herself. How did she know she loved Page Emlyn? Had she not thought the same of James Calvert? And might she not this time be terribly mistaken, even as she had been the time before? In the cold and heavy months of winter she had ploughed through these depressing doubts of herself, but now in the awakening and stretching, and taking hold upon life of the whole world about her, her young spirit leaped up and threw off its morbid fetters in a wild and happy rebellion. She a poisonous thing that blighted everything it touched! In the sunshine of her garden, Hester Rymal flung back her head and laughed in joyous scorn of the thought — a laugh so sudden and so filled with delicious youth and vitality, that a little brown wren on the cornice of the porch checked his own sweet comments upon spring, and cocked a sympathetic eye upon Hester there below him stooping over her garden beds, deciding no doubt in his own mind that this was a human being's way of giving expression to the pleasantness of the weather.

Hester laughed again. She an unhealthy thing in-

## TANGLED WEBS

deed! Young, strong, and buoyant of spirit, she could not be crippled forever by one mistake, very terrible though that mistake had been, and though she should always carry the remorse of it in her heart. But it was a mistake, after all, and not a sin, so why should she let it wreck her happiness, and the possible happiness of another as well?

Thus in the arrogance of youth and the breath of spring, Hester argued with herself, believing that only the thought that she had loved James Calvert stood between herself and Page Emlyn. And unaware also, that in this rather curiously constituted world — which is certainly not like any other world that the author ever knew — mistakes often appear to bring a retribution more severe even than the commission of sins themselves.

So spring stood to Hester for love and the re-awakening of the buoyancy and health of her nature. Every season has to each one of us its own peculiar attitude. For Cousin Lizzie spring meant house-cleaning: the beating and putting away of carpets, the washing and putting down of mattings in their place; the spreading of mattresses and feather pillows all over the clean and fragrant grass of the back yard; and the raking up of the dried leaves upon the lawn. For her it was a sort of deep drawing of breath, and the reconcentration of fresh energies and enthusiasm along domestic lines.

To the Judge it stood for busy, genial days, when he mounted his horse and rode over the farm to superintend the planting of his fields; a sunnily warm and

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

happy time for him, when an unlooked-for shower was the height of his misfortune, and when a whole long day of successful sowing could hardly have found in Heaven itself a match for its blissful pulse of satisfaction.

And even as Hester Rymal worked in her garden, so Dolly Calvert worked also in hers, and thought little tender frightened thoughts of love on her own account. And Richard Breeze sat in his office and waited for clients, and thought of Dolly; while across the hall Page Emlyn sat at his desk, and fought with his very soul against all such thoughts — fought against them in spite of the fact that his windows were wide open, and that the sights and the sounds and the perfumes of spring came flooding in in long delicious gasps of love.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### UNCLE BILLY CHESTER

"RICHARD," said Page Emlyn late in the month, "do you know where that old man they call Uncle Billy Chester lives?"

"You bet I do!" said Richard, cordially. "His farm is only four miles beyond our home place. Why?"

"I want to see him," returned the other. "Do you happen to have any influence with him?" he added.

Richard shook his head pessimistically, "Mighty little," he said. "He's a curious old customer, owns a lot of land down our way, and has an undying hatred of the Calverts — doggone him!"

"What set him against the Calverts?" Emlyn asked.

"Oh, I don't know. The old Colonel antagonized a good many of the people around. You know he was pretty overbearing in his ways, and thought the Calverts were the only aristocrats in sight. Well, of course Uncle Billy's long suit isn't ancestral trees exactly, but he never would take much from any man, and I reckon some of the Colonel's—er— well, let's call them his old-fashioned manners— must have jarred on Uncle Billy somehow, anyhow he started out to hate him and all his family about fifty years ago, and I

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reckon after you've done a thing for fifty years steady it gets to be a sort of habit with you — and they used to tell me at school that habit was a cable, every day you forged a link of it and soon you couldn't break it."

"Well, I should think after fifty years' practice that might be quite true," Emlyn admitted. "Is it really a fact that he's tied up that Calvert tract so that there's no outlet to it?"

"That's right," said Richard. "And I reckon if the old Colonel hadn't made Uncle Billy mad, the Calverts would be rich people to-day. You see really the only practical outlet for that timber is down what they call Reeve's Hollow, and Uncle Billy's gone and bought up all the land at the mouth of it."

"Is it as rich a tract as they say?" Emlyn pursued.

"*Rich?*" Richard returned. "My oh!" He shut his eyes ecstatically. "It's so rich that just to go along the tops of the ridges — let alone the hollows — makes a timber dealer's tongue hang out clear down to his waist. It was virgin forest when the old Colonel bought it, and that was fifty years ago, and thanks to Uncle Billy nobody's been able to touch it since. I reckon after fifty years a virgin forest gets to be what you might call an old maid, but if that's so, this one, at any rate, is a pretty rich old lady all right."

"How much do you think it ought to bring?" asked Emlyn.

"It won't bring anything with Uncle Billy sitting down there doing the watch-dog act at the mouth of Reeve's Hollow."

## UNCLE BILLY CHESTER

"Well, just suppose you could get around Uncle Billy."

"Oh, I should say anywhere from seventy-five thousand to a hundred thousand," Richard returned.

"That would make Mrs. Calvert quite comfortable, wouldn't it?" said Emlyn.

"You bet!" Richard answered enthusiastically. "And then Dolly could afford to marry."

"To marry whom?" said Emlyn.

"To marry me," said Richard.

"Well, just look at that," Emlyn went on, tossing the other over a typewritten letter. It was a letter from the Rich Creek Lumber Company for which Emlyn had been attorney in Cincinnati. The Company was desirous of securing a large tract of timber in West Virginia, and mentioned the amount they would be willing to pay if a suitable one could be obtained.

"Geel!" said Richard, in appreciation of the very large sum indicated.

"Dick," Emlyn said, "let's see if we can't get around old Uncle Billy. I'd like to sell that tract for Mrs. Calvert, and also there'd be a commission in it for you and me that might be worth your while."

"You bet your life it would!" said Richard, excitedly.

"I've been looking up the deeds lately and the titles are all right, and I've had it re-surveyed as well to be sure that there's no hitch about the calls, and really Uncle Billy seems to be the only stumbling-block."

"Well, you'll find he's all that's necessary," Richard

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returned gloomily. "But I'd like to try to get the deal through all right."

"I thought he might be induced to sell the land at the mouth of the hollow if we offered him a good price," Emlyn went on. "I'd be willing to advance the money for that myself."

"Well, there's nothing like trying, anyhow," Richard said, his enthusiasm kindling. "And oh, but gee! It would be a jim-dandy thing for all hands concerned if we could put it through!"

"Could you take me out to the old man's place to-morrow?" Emlyn asked.

"Wait a sec' till I just look at my docket," Richard returned elaborately, disappearing into his office. "That's all right," he said returning in a few minutes. "I've only got four or five cases to look up to-morrow, and they're all little ones and can be put off easily enough."

Emlyn heaved a sigh of mock relief. "Thank goodness!" he cried, "I was afraid I might not be able to get you."

Richard waved an airy hand. "Don't mention it," he said. "I'm always glad to oblige a friend, and beside I make a point of never letting business interfere with pleasure."

It was high noon of the next day, very sweet and very warm; very fragrant with wandering perfumes that the careless breeze tossed here and there; and very softly dreamy with thoughts of spring and flowering. Richard and Page Emlyn had dined at Richard's home, where



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every one from Mrs. Breeze down to Tommy had taken an immense fancy to the former, and now they were on their way to Uncle Billy Chester's farm. Emlyn was facing the blue devils of temptation that day. When they had set out from Willoughby in the early sweetness of the morning, he had caught a fleeting glimpse of Hester standing on her own porch clad in a pink cotton frock. And the picture of her standing there in the clear morning freshness, and waving a gay hand to them as they passed, made Page Emlyn

"Desire — desire  
To go the way a god might go,  
Through love and life and fire."

And because the devils came and leered at him, he summoned all the gay vivacity and charm of his old nature and flung them defiantly in their faces. And the weapons he chose for the undoing of the devils made him an unusually attractive companion.

"Richard says Mr. Emlyn's the most eloquent orator they've ever had in Willoughby," said Emmy Breeze with a little sigh, as she and Lotty stood on the porch and watched Richard and Emlyn disappear down the long driveway. "And you know, Lotty, Patrick Henry spoke there once."

"Yes, I know, Emmy dear," Lotty returned; "but I can't help thinking when Dick said that, he must have forgotten about Patrick Henry, as would be only natural, you know, for Dicky was such a

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very little boy when Patrick Henry came to Wil-  
loughby."

"O *silly!*" said Emmy.

"Never mind, Emmy darling, you'll see him soon  
again if we go over to stay with Hester next week."

"See whom? Patrick Henry?" Emmy demanded.

"No, dearest, not Patrick Henry," Lotty returned  
elaborately.

But Emmy always had one defence against Lotty's  
teasing. She came over now and put her arm around  
the other's neck in sisterly tenderness. "Dearest  
Lotty," she said in a gentle whisper, "we shall also see  
Eugene by that time." And in spite of the other's  
frantic wriggles she succeeded in bestowing a sisterly,  
though uncertain kiss upon Lotty's rebellious head.  
"*Dear* little sister," she murmured, and ducked away  
just in time to save her ears from being boxed.

Richard and Emlyn let their horses take their way  
leisurely up the steep track toward Uncle Billy's farm.  
On one side of the road the mountain went up abruptly  
to the blue heaven of the sky, on the other it went down  
into a little ravine where it could dabble its feet lux-  
uriously in a tiny stream which went absent-mindedly  
on its way, evidently lost in deep and dreamy thoughts,  
thoughts about the flowers which peeped over at their  
own reflections, and about the birds who sang above it.  
The flowers' sweet faces were certainly mirrored there  
in little crinkling rainbows of colour, and who knows  
but what the birds' songs as well may not have found  
a reflection in some of the dreamy and shadowed pools?

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If sometime in the still tenderness of the woods, looking deep into a little lost brook, you see suddenly a beautiful iridescent breath of colour, a sort of transparent opal — or perhaps a bubble that has gone astray — why that is the reflection of a bird's song; of that brown thrush's, for instance, that sang there on that hickory tree a moment ago. But of course, if, looking intently, you fail to see it, you need not jump to the conclusion that it is not there. Indeed you may be thankful if that is all on your journey through life that you fail to see. For it is to be feared that we constantly miss seeing plenty and plenty of things all about us, far more obvious and far more important than the mere spring reflection of a bird's song in a brook. But if Heaven smiles for you and you do chance to see it, look at it quickly, for it is a new little baby poem, very young and very fresh and very fleeting, for the reflection of a song does not last long, and in a little while it will disintegrate and be lost, dissolving into the brook itself, and thus adding its dainty elusive contribution to all the latter's liquid poetry, a poetry which is composed of a hundred other ethereal things — the perfume of the woods, the flowers' faces, and the little soft ripple of its own self across the shallows; the remembrance of all of which the little brook carries faithfully down to the larger, dirtier streams, long ago polluted by man, to give them thus a little whisper of assurance that there is somewhere poetry and beauty still left in the world.

All about in the ravine were grey boulders, half lost

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among the bracken, and hidden in their green mantles of moss; while up and down the sides of the mountains the pink and yellow azaleas flaunted their tall branches of colour, the white laurel was bursting into flower, and the dogwood bushes held their outstretched arms full of white bloom up against the blue sky.

Richard kicked his feet out of his stirrups, and rode loosely in his saddle, his eyes following his horse's steady hoof-beats absently. He seemed somewhat ill at ease. However, the still sweetness of the woods was reassuring, and presently he spoke. "You know," he began, and paused; but in a minute he went bravely on again. "You know I'm in love with Dolly Calvert," he said.

"No!" cried Emlyn. "Well, you do surprise me!"

"Oh, get out!" Richard returned. "I reckon everybody in the world knows it, and I don't care if they do. And it's because I — do care like that for her — that I want to know if you're in earnest too, or just fooling — I like you just like everything, you know, you're a cracking good fellow all right — and if you really are in love with her, why, well and good. I reckon it'll make my chances pretty slim, but it'll be all fair enough, and if she prefers you to me I won't kick about it. But if you're just fooling with her —"

"Hold on, Dick!" Emlyn cut in sharply, pulling up his horse and stopping suddenly in the road, having listened to Richard's speech so far, too astonished to speak. "Just let me understand what you mean," he said.

Richard pulled up, too, his pleasant good-natured

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face with a troubled cloud upon it, and also a growing firmness about his mouth.

"Why, there's nothing much to understand about it," he returned. "It's just the question of whether you're really in love with Dolly or whether you're flirting with her."

"Great heavens, man!" cried Emlyn, beginning to lose his temper. "What kind of a brute do you take me for, anyway?"

"Then you *are* in love with her?" said Richard.

The other was silent in astonishment for a moment.

"Why, no," he said at length; "I think Miss Dolly is very lovely and very sweet, but I'm not in love with her."

"Then it's just as I thought, and you're flirting with her!" said Richard, fiercely. "And it's my business to tell you frankly, that all that sort of thing has got to stop right here and now."

"Why, Gracious Heavens, you young idiot, I'm not flirting with her!" Emlyn returned, and by now he was very angry.

"Well, I'd like to know what you call it?" Richard said.

"Call it — why, I don't call it anything."

"Oh, you don't call it anything, don't you?" Richard burst out. "You don't call it anything for a good-looking, rich and attractive man, with all his fine city manners to settle in a small place like Willoughby, and pay devoted attention to a little girl who's barely grown, and so young and so innocent that she's too sweet

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to suspect anything, and so when a man seems to be offering her his love, of course she thinks he means it. And as he's the most interesting man and the most cultivated she ever saw, she's naturally attracted by him."

"Attracted by him, what do you mean?" cried Emlyn, sharply.

"Mean?" Richard flashed back. "Why, Great Heavens! I mean Dorothy Calvert is in love with you!"

"It's not so — it's not true!" cried Emlyn, breathlessly. "It can't be so — I know it's not so! Why, it's — it's — the whole idea is ridiculous — preposterous!" Horrible, awful, unspeakable, his heart cried out, and yet, overwhelming as Richard's words were, why after all might they not be true?

"Well, I don't know why it can't be true," Richard returned with sharp irony. "You're not some freak of nature, you know, and men have succeeded in making women care for them before this. She mayn't be in love with you yet — I hope in my soul she isn't — but if she isn't, it won't be *your* fault. You're always doing things for her — taking her to drive, and giving her flowers and candy and things, and everybody in Willoughby's talking about it."

"But such a thing never occurred to me!" Emlyn protested helplessly. Richard's only reply was an incredulous and angry laugh.

Emlyn struck his horse sharply and the two rode on in silence.

Emlyn's heart stood still in horror and remorse at

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the possibility which Richard had suggested. Dorothy Calvert in love with *him*! Him, of all people! In the face of the past what could be more terrible? And yet, blind fool that he had been, why should it not be so? In the light of Richard's words he remembered a hundred things that he had done for Dolly. He had done them all, it is true, out of his sharp remorse, and posing always in his own mind as James Calvert. But how was Dolly to know this? How indeed should anybody know it? To himself he might be James Calvert, but to the world at large he was certainly Page Emlyn, and now that the idea was presented to him, he was overwhelmed by his own unbelievable stupidity. His remorse had so blinded him to every other point of view, so absorbed him in his endeavoured atonement, that, as regarded the Calverts at least, there had been no room in his mind for any other idea. But now Richard's words shook his thoughts violently free of this absorption, and he realized all at once where his remorse had carried him.

For a time he rode on, staring straight before him, and not speaking. Here was another terrible and sudden entanglement of all the dreary situation.

He turned round at length upon Richard, his anger all gone.

"Richard," he said, humbled by his own stupidity, "I don't wonder you think I'm an unspeakable brute, but I give you my word of honour that such a thing never for one instant occurred to me — not for an instant."

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Richard's angry eyes still stared between his horse's brown ears at the road in front of him.

"I'd find that mighty hard to believe if any other fellow told it to me," he said briefly.

"I suppose you would," said Emlyn, steadily; "and I certainly can't blame you, but it's true all the same, and I tell you honestly that I never for one moment thought of trying to make her care for me. I'm awfully glad you gave me a hint."

"Hint!" cried Richard, laughing suddenly in spite of himself. "Well, I'll be dogged! they may call that a hint in Cincinnati, but in West Virginia we call it the straight-out truth."

"Whatever attentions I have shown her," Emlyn went on, "I did, not because I was in love with her — though I do admire her, and think her very sweet and charming — but because I was sorry for her, and for Mrs. Calvert on account of James Calvert's death." He paused a moment and then went on again determinately. "I was — I was awfully shocked by his death — you know I was out in the woods with him at the time it happened — and a — a sudden thing like that makes a tremendous impression on a man. And I felt so keenly about it, and so sorry for all of them, that somehow I wanted to do everything in my power to make it a little easier — Oh!" he broke off, "of course that all sounds perfectly insane to you."

Richard did not answer at once, and for a little while they rode without speaking, their horses' hoofs striking



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sharply every now and again against the loose stones in the road, the shade and perfumes of the woods meeting them softly.

At last he spoke. "As I said before, I'd find that mighty hard to believe in any other fellow," he repeated.

"There isn't any reason for you to believe it," said Emlyn, quietly, "except that it's true, and that I tell you so."

"Well," said Richard, "I know there isn't, but — I do believe it just the same," he wound up.

Emlyn drew a breath of relief. "That's awfully good of you, Dick," he said sincerely.

"Only for Heaven's sake!" Richard went on irritably, "Don't go on acting as if you were in love with her, just out of compassion, or you may find your pity will break her heart. Here we are at Uncle Billy's," he added, as their road came at last to some cleared fields on the top of the mountain.

As they passed through the gate and rode up a sort of lane, leading to the house — a rather large farmhouse partly log and partly frame — Emlyn turned over Richard's last remark in his own mind. Of course the latter did not know the real remorseful reason for his devotion to the Calverts, yet what he said was so natural and so sane, that it served to open his eyes still wider to the peril and falseness of the whole position. He began to wonder if his contrition had not led him, not only out of all bounds of reason, but also into a poignantly dangerous situation as

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well, and for the first time, a distrust of what he had undertaken assailed him.

Their approach to Uncle Billy's was greeted by furious barking from two black and tan hounds, who rushed out full of frantic importance over the responsibility of defending their master's property — their attitude being altogether very masculine and egotistical. Alas for their zeal! In their haste they rushed by an old mother hen and scattered her frightened brood of chicks far and wide. Such an exhibition of masculine thoughtlessness was really more than the hen's nerves and femininity could stand, and on the instant she went quite mad with anger. With a squawk of sheer exasperation, she ruffled up all her feathers and flung herself passionately upon the dogs. Round and round she flew, attacking first one of them and then the other, pecking them, beating them with her wings, and squawking in their faces — a little wild devil of incarnate anger and fury. And in one short instant the dogs' fussy bubble of pomposity was pricked, and, sticking their tails between their legs, they fled yelping to the rear, glancing back over their shoulders with agitated and fearful eyes to see what demon was upon them. The lady hen followed hard on their heels. "You great blundering lumps of ignorance!" she squawked; "I'll teach *you* some consideration for other people's nerves!" And with the words she gave a flying leap and landed upon one of the fleeing backs — whereat the dog rent high heaven with his howls of despair, and agonizing protests that he never meant

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any harm and was just trying to do his duty. The hen came back presently to her scattered brood, her feathers still wildly ruffled, mincing and clucking and commenting to herself on the absolute blank stupidity of dogs in general, and assuring herself with nervous agitation that she had at least given these two a lesson.

"Gee!" said Richard, as they dismounted at the stable and hitched their horses, "I'm mighty glad that old lady hen ain't my wife; her nerves seem to be right much on edge — that's what they call temperament nowadays, I suppose."

At the house door they were met and welcomed by Uncle Billy's married daughter, Mrs. Fletcher, a comely and cheerful matron of goodly proportions, who was entirely surrounded by children.

"Walk in, walk in," she said cordially, after greetings and introductions had been exchanged. "Pa'll be real glad to see company. How's all your folks, Mr. Breeze?"

They passed into the sitting-room and Mrs. Fletcher went to call her father. He came in presently, a hale and hearty old mountaineer, whose long white beard reached almost to his waist. He greeted them jovially.

"Well, young fellar," he said to Richard, giving him a friendly dig in the ribs. "They tells me you've set up for yerself in Willoughby. How's business? Keep you pretty close?"

"Well, I find time to get out every now and then to

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see my friends," Richard returned shouting the words at the top of his lungs, for Uncle Billy was exceedingly deaf.

"Well, well!" Uncle Billy returned, "I allers did like to see young fellars work hard — sweats the meanness out er 'em, I say. Now, then!" he went on, "let's pitch our cheers out in the air and have a real *good* talk." And so saying he led the way out to the small front porch of the house. Outside the sweet beauty of the May weather presented an inevitable opening topic of conversation.

"Beautiful weather we're having now," Emlyn volunteered.

"Ha-a-n?" said Uncle Billy.

"It's a beautiful day — beautiful weather," Emlyn shouted in a louder tone.

"Beautiful *what*?" Uncle Billy returned.

Emlyn gathered himself together for another onslaught upon his simple remark, but Mrs. Fletcher cut him short. She and most of the children had come out to the porch also.

"He says it's a beautiful day, paw," she cried in a high key.

"Oh, a beautiful day!" grunted Uncle Billy. "Well, I reckon that's a fact, but I kin see that fer myself, an' you might jest as well let him know right off that I'm kinder deaf, so it reely ain't wurth his while fer him to be splittin' his throat ter tell me a triflin' thing like that."

Emlyn laughed in spite of himself.

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"Then we'd better get straight to business," he suggested.

"Ha-a-n?" said Uncle Billy.

"I say we'd better get straight to business," Emlyn shouted.

"Well, help yerself," said Uncle Billy, "that'll suit me all right."

He tipped his chair back against the porch railing comfortably, looking away at the view, his large proportions disposed easily, and himself evidently undisturbed by any embarrassment.

"Mr. Breeze tells me that you own a tract of land at the mouth of Reeve's Hollow," Emlyn shouted.

"Ha-a-n?" said Uncle Billy.

"He ses," his daughter interposed, "that you own ther tract of land at ther mouth of Reeve's Holler."

"Well, Elizy," Uncle Billy returned, mildly remonstrative, "*I* can't help his sayin' that."

Mrs. Fletcher sighed. "I don't know what's got inter paw," she said apologetically, "he ain't usually so deaf, an' I *never* seed him so contrary."

"Do you want to sell that tract?" Emlyn ventured at the top of his lungs.

"No, I don't!" Uncle Billy returned with surprising promptness.

"I was thinking of making you an offer for it," Emlyn went on.

"Then you'd better take my advice, young fellar," Uncle Billy returned frankly, "an' put in yer time thinkin' about somethin' else. That land ain't wurth

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buyin' — it ain't got er splinter er timber on it big enough fer the devil ter pick his teeth with."

"Oh-h-h, *paw!*" his daughter remonstrated in high sharp tones.

Her father whirled round upon her. "Now, then, what's the matter with *you*, Elizy?" he demanded.

"Nothin', paw," she responded meekly, "nothin'."

"Well, then, don't go a *bleatin'* out 'Oh, paw' at me like that all the time," Uncle Billy said, combing his fingers furiously through his long white beard.

One of the youngest Fletchers regarded his grandfather with interest. He was a person of about three summers, or, to be more accurate, of three summers and four winters.

"Gran'paw's mad," he announced frankly to his brothers and sisters. He slipped down from his perch on the porch railing, his calico skirts wisping themselves up round his neck as he made the descent, and going over to the old man he climbed confidently up into his lap.

"Is you mad, gran'paw?" he inquired sociably, as he curled himself round and settled down.

His grandfather did not reply, but he put his arm around the small person and crossed his legs for his added convenience.

"Would you consider fifteen dollars an acre for that tract?" Emlyn inquired.

"No, I wouldn't," Uncle Billy returned promptly. "I tell yer the land ain't wurth it. There ain't no timber left atop of it, an' there ain't nothin' under-

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neath it, fer I've had fellars diggin' round there fer coal, er iron ore."

"Shall I tell you the truth?" said Emlyn, taking a sudden resolution.

"Ha-a-n?" said Uncle Billy.

"I can make gran'paw hear!" the small person piped up unexpectedly. He sat off a little distance on his grandfather's knee, and drew in a long breath, his small body swelling visibly with the coming effort. "He ses shall he tell yer ther truth, gran'paw," he shrilled.

"Oh, ther *truth*?" Uncle Billy returned. He expectorated over the porch railing with extreme accuracy and placidity. "Well, honey," he said, "yer tell him frum me I jest wished he would, an' moreover, ef he do, he'll be the furst land dealer what ever done it."

"He ses he jest wished you would, an' he ses, ef you do, you'll be ther furst land dealer what ever done it!" the small person screamed at the top of his lungs, very proud of himself, and forgetting entirely in his excitement that Emlyn was not deaf also.

His grandfather heard, and though he did not laugh out loud, his whole large body shook with deep internal delight.

But the small person's zeal had overshot its mark, and his mother rose severely to the occasion, shocked both at her offspring's and her father's behaviour in the face of company. "Johnny," she commanded, "you git right down off er yer gran'paw's lap now — git down! I say, an' go on in ther house."

But Johnny snuggled back more securely into the

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circle of his grandfather's arm. "I ain't goin'," he said rebelliously.

Mrs. Fletcher turned to one of the older children, a boy of about eight. "Ford, honey," she said in light conversational tones, "yer run into the house an' see ef mammy didn't lay a hickory switch up over the settin'-room mantel shelf."

Ford jumped up from the porch steps with alacrity and scudded into the house.

But Johnny, being a gentleman of discretion, took the maternal hint, and with a howl leaped down from his grandfather's knee, and scuttled indoors after his brother.

The atmosphere thus somewhat cleared of children, Emlyn prepared to return to business. Suddenly, however, an idea occurred to him.

He had in his hand a long pasteboard tube in which the lines for the Calvert tract were rolled. Quickly removing the latter he assayed to use the tube as an ear trumpet. But Uncle Billy had never before been approached in like manner, and he shied away from the other's advances rather nervously, eying the trumpet with distinct apprehension, as Emlyn endeavoured to point it toward his ear. However, after a little explanation, half shouting, half pantomime, the latter induced him to give it a trial.

"I thought," he said, speaking through the tube, "that you might be able to hear better with this."

A look of surprise and delight dawned upon the old man's face.



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"Well, I'll be dogged ef I don't hear real well!" he cried in astonishment, and he turned an eye of scrutinizing approval upon the trumpet and upon Emlyn.

Thus encouraged the other proceeded.

"The truth of the matter is," he said, "that I want to buy that land for the sake of getting the rights of way to the Calvert tract."

Uncle Billy withdrew himself from the trumpet's range and slapped his thigh resoundingly.

"I knowed it!" he cried triumphantly. "I *knowed* that was what you was a-nosing round after all the time! An' you ain't the fust fellar to offer me five times as much as that little old piece er land's wurth. But I'll tell you *one* thing," he continued, waving his large bony hand, "yer're the fust fellar that ever come out on ther square an' said what they wanted hit fer. There was one fellar said he was after it fer a peach orchard, an' then ernuther *sēs* how it was jest the place he was lookin' fer fer er Angory goat run; an' then come ernuther an' puts up a big bluff 'bout how he likes the view there — *he* was jest about as nigh nothin' as they make 'em. Yessir! I jest tell yer, fellars, when I buyed that there little strip er land, I ses to myself, I ses, Billy Chester, that there land ain't wurth much ter yer in dollars an' cents, but it'll be wurth er whole heap er enjoyment ter yer 'fore yer're done with it, an' what's more it'll jest evermore lastingly make the Calverts sweat ter git around yer — an' it certainly was a fact," he added with satisfaction. "They've jest had ter sweat good an' plenty." He chuckled reminiscently.

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"An' reckon," he went on, "folks knows *now* that they can't do old Uncle Billy dirt 'thout havin' to pay fer hit — no *sir* — *ee!*"

"What have you got against the Calverts?" Emlyn asked. "What did they ever do to you?"

"*Do ter me!*" Uncle Billy exclaimed. "Why, Eustace — the doggone old raskil — him an' me was in a deal tergether, an' he jest nat'ally tried ter cheat me outer my eye teeth — his own was store ones, an' I reckon he didn't think other folks set any more by their'n than he did by his'n. I wouldn't er minded so much his *tryin'* ter cheat me," Uncle Billy admitted frankly, "but the part I hated about it was that he come pretty nigh doing it. Oh, ther Calverts is smart all right, but I kin git erhead er 'em" — Uncle Billy locked his teeth aggressively together. "Yes sir — *ee!*" he cried again, "I kin git erhead of 'em!"

"Well," said Emlyn, "there are not many of them left now to get ahead of."

"That's a fact," said Uncle Billy with satisfaction. "The Lord's done his best ter git rid er 'em. But ther's still three of 'em left," he added as an after-thought.

Emlyn put the improvised trumpet up quickly. "Yes," he cried hotly, "there are three of them left — and what are those three? One of them's a young fellow, hardly more than a boy, working his very soul out, there in Baltimore, so that he can become a doctor and support his mother and sister — and what are the other two? Helpless women, both of them! One of them

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growing old and facing poverty, and the other a soft little young thing —”

(“And pretty too,” Richard cut in sotto voce.)

“— who’s never known anything about life.”

“Yes!” cried Uncle Billy, excitedly. “An’ you ask me what they aire, an’ I tell yer every one er ’em’s Calverts — *damned* Calverts!”

But Emlyn was aroused now.

“Yes,” he retorted, “they are Calverts — but one of them is a young man who never did you any harm in all his life — I don’t believe you ever saw him even — and I tell you the other two are women — women! And *you* call yourself a man — a man who’s worked and fought hard all his life, and what’s all your working and all your fighting brought you to? I’ll tell you — it’s brought you to an old age given over to hatred of people you never even saw!”

(“Gee!” said Richard in an undertone. “Stand, my men, the ground is yours all right.”)

“— people you never saw,” Emlyn went on, just pausing to catch his breath. “And why? Just because forty years ago —”

“Nigher fifty,” Uncle Billy cut in.

“Very well, fifty years ago then,” Emlyn rushed on, though in truth the interruption threw him out of his stride a little. “Fifty years ago a man did you a wrong, and ever since that time you’ve been sitting back here on the top of your mountain hating him — and hating all of his name! And what good has it ever done you?”

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"It's give me er sight er satisfaction," Uncle Billy answered promptly.

But Emlyn continued, paying no attention. "And now the man you hated has been dead fifteen years and you've had your revenge a hundred times over, but you go on hating because you think it's fine and strong to do it —" he paused suddenly, and then resumed in a quieter tone. "I'll tell you," he said, "what is fine and strong and brave, and that is to forgive — to forgive instead of hating. And I tell you too what I honestly believe to be true, you'll be a happier man if you go into the next world at peace with the Calverts."

"Well, well, well!" said Uncle Billy; after which he went off into another attack of his disconcerting inward laughter.

Emlyn rose abruptly. "Come on, Dick," he said, "it'll be late before we get back to Willoughby." He knew he had failed, and he felt a sort of helpless scorn of himself and an irritation over his failure; moreover, he was rather disgusted at his own burst of eloquence.

"Oh, set erwhile," said Uncle Billy. "Yer certainly kin talk, young fellar."

"Gee!" said Richard, drawing a long breath and gathering himself up from his chair.

Uncle Billy looked up at Emlyn.

"Yer're right smart of er *orrater*, ain't you?" he said. "Now I ain't hed a sermon all to myself like that fer er right smart spell, an' I wouldn't wonder ef it did me a heap er good;" and with the words he slapped his leg, and was shaken by silent laughter once

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more. "Yes sir, er heap er good!" he added, choking and spluttering and trying to catch his breath. "It'll do me all the good in the world, but it won't do one thing, it won't make me fergit how to hate the Calverts, an' jest you remember *that!*" he concluded decisively.

However, he held out a huge hand in cordial farewell.

"But I ain't got nothin' ergin *you*," he went on. "Come over an' preach ter me ergin most any time you've got er mind to; I likes to hear you talk. Next month now," he said, "is a mighty good time for preachin' out this way. The cherries is ripe then an' Elizy's a great hand at makin' cherry pie. An' kin I keep this here little trick?" he added, waving the paste-board tube.

"Oh yes, keep it, of course," Emlyn returned. "But I'll tell you what I'll do," he added impulsively, "I'll send you a real trumpet from the city, so that the next time I come to preach you'll be able to hear my sermon better," and he wound up with a laugh in spite of his own defeat.

"Well so do, so do!" said Uncle Billy, chuckling.

"Doggone his old ugly picture!" said Richard heartily as they rode away. "But Gee! Emlyn, that was a grand give-me-liberty or give-me-death speech you made through the old buster's ear trumpet." And Richard doubled himself up in sudden laughter. "Golly!" he said, "I wouldn't have missed that, not for a farm down South."

"And all wasted too," said Emlyn, ruefully.

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He was sharply disappointed that his mission had proved so unsuccessful. For some reason he had had an unexplained confidence in his ability to win the old man over, and now in the face of his failure he was more chagrined than he cared to admit.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ROAD OF DESIRE

AGAIN time moved slowly on, and all up and down the valley the full green leafage of June took hot bright possession of the land. June, which is that pretty older sister of May, or perhaps is May herself grown up to gracious young ladyhood, with all her tiny buds and flowers in exuberant full bloom now, and all her bird songs of love transformed into the hungry twitter of nests full of young ones, and the whole world consumed with the magnificent joyous law of reproduction, each species so possessed with the idea of its own glad significance that it firmly believes it impossible for the world to continue without heaps and heaps more babies of its own particular kind. It is only man who ever pauses to wonder morbidly if more of himself is a good thing or not. All the rest of God's children are radiantly convinced of their own value and importance. Every growing thing had a flower, or the promise of a seed, and every little wild thing had its treasured offspring; and every growing thing, and every wild thing, showed their children proudly to Mother Nature when she came stepping down the valley on silent feet to inquire after the children. And

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it is quite impossible to imagine how fond Mother Nature is of babies; babies of every variety, from a little spotted fawn hidden away in the remote mountains, all the way down to the large families of white dandelion blows. She loves them all, and cuddles and caresses them all with the wind and sunshine and soft rains, that God gives to her in the spring and summer for the education of the babies. Indeed, so absorbed is she in the thought of them that there are times when it would seem as though Nature really had no imagination beyond babies.

In Willoughby and on its surrounding farms in this gay June weather, the breathless question which all the girls asked one another when they came together was, "Oh, are *you* going to Hester Rymal's picnic?"

"Yes, I'm going, are you?" And then excitedly — "*What* are you going to wear?"

Hester Rymal had the two Breeze girls, Lottie and Emmy, staying with her, and she was giving a picnic for them at Nevil's Cave, a place about fifteen miles from Willoughby, where in the freaky limestone a prehistoric creek has worn a wonderful deep cavern, with secret chambers and passages; hidden gurgling rivulets; white dripping of stalactites coming down from above, with columns of stalagmites going up to meet them, and in fact all the proper attributes of the conventional cave.

Hester had come to a deep determination. She knew that Page Emlyn loved her, and in the restored confidence in herself which the spring weather had



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brought, she knew also that she loved him. There were the plain unmistakable facts of the case. Therefore, in spite of her ever present remorse, with this great knowledge facing her, was it right, was it fair, she asked herself, that an artificial barrier of untruth should be allowed to stand between them? Hester knew that on that terrible evening of James Calvert's death Emlyn had overheard her tell Dolly that she had loved her brother. She had told the lie for the sake of Dolly's frantic grief; had she not a right now to untell it for the sake of her own and another's happiness?

It was the first picnic of the summer and almost every girl set to work on a new flowered muslin for the occasion, and yards and yards of fluffy organdy were ruffled and shirred and tucked and laced, into what the fashion papers designate as dainty summer creations; and when the day of the picnic dawned at last, the two straw-filled, four-horsed wagons which set out from Willoughby looked indeed like the proverbial flower garden.

"Gee!" said Richard Breeze, perched high upon the driving seat of the second wagon and managing his horses in a very dashing style. "All this youth and beauty just goes right to a fellow's head, and if I were to look behind me I'd be so dazzled I couldn't see to drive straight." To which there replied a chorus of "That's right, Dick!" and "Then don't look back! Eyes to the front, old man!" and so forth from the young men present. To which the girls added

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

their chorus of shrieks and protesting oh's and giggles.

"Now, then, Richard Breeze!" cried Tessie Bedinger, whose yellow-butterfly personality was perched on the seat beside him, "if you drive over that bank I shall scream — yes, I just shall now — oh, look *out* for that gate post! Now you just did that to scare me! I wish somebody *would* make you behave — I'm just scared to death! Eugene Calvert, can't you make Richard behave?" she appealed, flirting round upon Eugene, who with the other young people was established in the hay at the bottom of the wagon.

"No, Miss Tessie, I can't do a thing with him if *you* can't," Eugene returned, his very handsome deep-set eyes bestowing upon her an ardent look intended to conceal the fact that, sitting next to Lottie Breeze, he had already succeeded in securing her little hand under cover of the banked-up hay. A state of affairs which nobody else was aware of, except, I think, perhaps Lottie herself must have known about it, though indeed she looked so softly and demurely away at the hazy June outlines of the Shadow Mountains, and her expression was so angelically youthful and sweet, that there really was no reason to suppose that she did. And of course any struggle to release her fingers would merely have called embarrassing attention to their position. Therefore, why struggle? In truth she did not. She merely looked away at the distant mountains, smiling dreamily, and thanking the lucky stars which had placed her brother's back toward

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her, and Emmy safely in the other wagon on the driving seat beside Page Emlyn.

"Well, I just can't do one *thing* with him!" Tessie took up her complaint again. "Not one single thing! But just look at Page Emlyn drive — um — um —! Ain't he the *grandest* thing! Richard Breeze, now you just stop that! Hester Rymal, make Dick *behave!*"

"Why, that's what I put you up there for," Hester returned gaily.

Hester looked very lovely that morning. Her cheeks were pink, and her eyes were bright and dark with excitement, and all her pulses were leaping, for to her also had come the

"Desire desire  
To go the way a god might go,  
Through love and life and fire."

There were twenty-four or so of the party all told. In one wagon went Cousin Lizzie as chaperone, and for the other they had captured the Judge, who it is true had climbed in and tucked his long legs under him not without a groan or two of protest.

"The trouble with you, Judge, is that your legs are too long," Richard had remarked, looking him over critically.

"Oh no, Richard," the Judge returned sadly, "it's not my *legs* that are too long, it's my years. I got used to having long legs a good while ago, but it's a lot harder job to get used to long years."

"O *father*, stop talking like that!" Hester cried

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severely. And all the other girls joined in with cries of "Oh-h-h! just listen to the Judge now — whoever heard of such a thing! Well, if *I* was just half as young as *he* is —"

"Well," said the Judge, "well, of course I'm not absolutely decrepit yet; but maybe after all you're trying to fool me. Richard," he shouted above the rattle of the wagon, "do you think these young ladies would try to fool an old man?"

"I don't know, sir, but I wouldn't trust them too far if I were you," Richard shouted back. "I believe they'd fool a Methuselah if they got a chance."

"*Methuselah!*" groaned the Judge. "Well, I can trust Dick to tell the truth, and anyway I didn't believe you young ladies. Lottie," he added suddenly, "it *is* a cold day, I don't wonder you have to keep your poor little hands down under the straw."

But Lottie was equal to the occasion. Amid the shout of laughter which followed, she drew out both her little brown hands and, looking at them, rubbed them softly together and blew on them.

"They are cold, Judge," she retorted. "But I think" — she hesitated demurely, looking at him out of the corners of her mischievous dark eyes — "I think if you were to hold them a little while they would feel better."

"Great Heavens!" cried the Judge in alarm. "Pull up, Dick!" he shouted. "I think I'd better go in the other wagon with my Cousin Lizzie Blair; she knows how to look after me a lot better than Hester does."

Hester laughed and struck into a little foolish song.

## THE ROAD OF DESIRE

"Pray papa, pray papa, do not go so soon!  
Pray papa, pray papa, stay a little longer!"

She sang the words mockingly, her voice sweet and fresh and laughing.

And over in the other wagon Page Emlyn heard the gay sweet notes go soaring and soaring up into the blue June sky, and for a breathless moment he shut his lips hard together, and the white road danced before his dazzled eyes, for he saw only the road of desire. Then for an instant he let go of himself, and with an answering laugh he too struck into the refrain of the whimsical little song. Hester and he chanced to be the only ones of the party who knew it, and there was a certain kinship and intimacy in the incident, and as their two voices soared away like butterflies fluttering up and up into the blue, their spirits as well seemed removed into a little retired place, away from all the rest of the world.

"Well, for the goodness' sake, that's just grand, Hessie, but let's sing something everybody knows!" Tessie cried as the song came to an end; and forthwith her thin little voice piped up,

"It's always fair weather when good fellows get together," and all the others followed her gaily into it. Afterwards Emlyn started "My Old Kentucky Home," and then Richard essayed "The Spanish Cavalier." And so, "singing song for song," the wagons rattled and bumped and jolted along between the green fence rows, and through little stretches of delightful shady wood-

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land, and up hill and down dale, until, hot and dusty and cheerful, they came at last to the brow of a steep hill, and sweeping down it and around a sharp turn — which Emlyn and Richard managed in fine style — they drew up in a lovely little ravine, or hollow, encircled on all sides by the hills, and overrun by rank grass, with the lid of the blue sky above.

“‘An’ dey never knowed where dey was at twill de ol’ ark bumped on *Ararat*,’” Richard Breeze announced as he jumped out.

It was a delightfully secluded spot, with a little path leading deeper into the ravine to the mouth of the cavern itself, whose silent and rocky entrance was overhung with long green tendrils of clematis and Virginia creeper blowing softly and lazily to and fro in the wind.

The gay party jumped out of the wagons and scattered here and there all over the little tranquil place, the men unhitching and feeding the horses, and the girls shaking out their ruffles, chattering together, and busying themselves with spreading the table-cloth, unpacking the baskets, and making lemonade, all under Cousin Lizzie’s energetic directions. That lady was in her element, and her plump little figure vibrated eagerly from lemonade bucket to picnic basket, and then back to white table-cloth again.

“Now, then, hand me out that layer cake — yes, put it right there, it’ll keep the table-cloth from blowing up — ough! Look at that nasty black ant! Brush him off, can’t you, Tessie? There, I’ll put these hard-boiled

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eggs over on this corner. Now, can't one of you boys get us some water? Judge, do *pray* don't sit down on that damp ground with your rheumatism."

("All right then, Lizzie, I'll sit down without it.")

"Now, then, I reckon we're all ready — come on, everybody. Tessie, quit flirting with Richard Breeze and come on here to dinner. I reckon he can tend to those horses without you to help him."

It was a gay sweet scene there in the cool hollow, with dandelions and violets stretching up on tip-toe, and craning their necks over the high grass to get a good view of all the excitement; with the sun filtering down through the trees in little splashes of twinkling colour; the silent breeze wandering fitfully here and there, and all the bright picture of the girls' gay dresses, set to the accompaniment of laughter and broken snatches of conversation and banter, or with little shrieks of agitation when an occasional spider made his hurried progress across the table-cloth. Later on, there descended upon the spirits of everyone that calm and tranquillity which comes in the heat of the day after a long drive and a satisfying meal.

"No, thank you, Cousin Lizzie," said Richard, "I don't believe I *could* eat any more, thank you'm, all I want now is just somebody to sing me to sleep, and Miss Tessie's going to do that for me."

"Well, did I ever! You must be crazy in your head, man! Do you think I'm going to sit up and sing a hot day like this? Besides, you promised to take us into the cave after dinner. I'm just crazy about that

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cave — I always did think it was the grandest place! Um — um — it just scares me to death! Come on, Richard.” With the words she jumped up restlessly, there being nothing of the repose of the Vere de Vere in her make-up. “Come on, Lottie, come on, Emmy! Mr. Emlyn, ain’t you coming?”

Richard got up with a groan. “O Gee!” he protested, “I reckon I’ve been into that old cave a million and one times, and every time,” he added ruefully, “it’s been with a different girl.”

“Come on, Lottie,” Tessie persisted, stretching out her hand to her.

For one fleeting moment Lottie’s eyes met those of Eugene Calvert. “I reckon I won’t go in this time, Tessie,” she said. “I’ve been in lots of times, and besides it nearly always gives me a cold,” and she gave a tiny shiver and coughed a small pathetic little cough. But for the life of her she could not help one brief apprehensive glance in the direction of her brother.

Richard said nothing, but he broke into a really distressing spasm of coughing.

“For the goodness’ sake! Richard Breeze, what is the matter with you — did you swallow a gnat?” Cousin Lizzie demanded.

“Nothing — ugh — ugh — Cousin Lizzie,” he managed to get out between gasps. “Nothing, but all our family have mighty delicate throats.”

“Well, now, ain’t that too bad!” said Cousin Lizzie. Under cover of which sympathetic remark Lottie



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managed to whisper fiercely to her brother, "Well, before *I'd* be a jack-rabbit!"

Which only sent him into another and still more distressing fit of coughing.

"Oh, come on, you all!" cried Tessie, impatiently, "I never did see such slow-pokes! You're coming, ain't you, Mr. Emlyn?" she demanded again.

He smiled at her politely. "I'm sorry, Miss Tessie," he returned, "but caves always have had just the very worst effect on all the members of my family."

"Um — um — *stung!*" cried Tessie. "Well, you come, Hester Rymal," she added. "I know caves don't hurt you."

But before Hester could reply, Cousin Lizzie unexpectedly cut in. "No," she said, "Hester must stay and help me get these things back into the baskets."

"Why, we'll all stay and help you, Cousin Lizzie," everybody cried in chorus.

"No — no, you all go on — Hester and Lottie will be a plenty," she returned.

"Well, for gracious' sake, come on then!" cried Tessie. "I ain't going to stand here begging you all, all the afternoon!" And with the words she ran down the path and whisked round the turn leading to the cave, and the rest of the party followed her, laughing.

Cousin Lizzie fell to work packing up the picnic things with quite furious zeal, the others helping her. "Now we'll just get these things done right away, and then *I'm* going to take a rest," she announced. And

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before long the baskets were repacked, the table-cloths folded, and all the scraps disposed of.

"*Now!*" cried Cousin Lizzie with a sigh of satisfaction, and establishing her back against a grassy bank, and spreading a newspaper over her face, she calmly and unequivocally shut herself away from all the outside world. The Judge, consoled by his pipe, was already half asleep under a near-by tree.

Lottie strolled idly over to one of the horses, and stopped a moment to pat its nose, Eugene following her. Thence by natural and easy stages, pausing to pick a long-stemmed violet here, a dandelion there, to dabble her hands in the little brook, or again to speak politely to another horse, she wandered further and further afield, Eugene wandering with her, and at length when a little knoll hid them from the eyes of all the world, his arms closed suddenly and tightly about her, and her head went down quite naturally against his shoulder.

There was a little still pause.

"But oh, dearest, *dearest!*" He cried at length, tragically in his dark young face. "It will be such a long, long time to wait!"

Her dancing eyes looked up at him. "Yes—dearest," she murmured; "but then you know, we are both *quite* young," she added. Which, considering that she was just turned eighteen, and he was not twenty-three, would appear to be undeniably true.

As Eugene and Lottie strolled away, Page Emlyn

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and Hester turned to each other with little involuntary smiles.

"Eugene has loved Lottie Breeze ever since they were *so* high," Hester said, measuring a child's height from the ground with her hand. "Just the way Richard has loved Dolly." With the words she paused abruptly, a little clutch at her heart, for it came to her all at once that even so, from his boyhood up, James Calvert had loved her. With a quick restless movement she turned away, and started almost unconsciously, along the path leading to the cave, and after a moment's hesitation Emlyn followed her.

Cousin Lizzie raised one corner of her paper and peeped out, and then she smiled, for, as has been said, with all the world she loved a lover.

The Judge also looked after the departing pair, but he did not smile, indeed he sighed as he put his pipe away, for he loved his daughter far too much to have any affection for a probable lover.

Side by side, Hester and Emlyn paced slowly down the little pathway, and making the turn came upon the dark and mysterious mouth of the cave, situated in its deep ravine with the green creepers blowing across it. It was the first time that they had been alone together since that white winter night of five months before. Each knew it, and each knew that the other was aware of it also. A little hidden tremour of excitement and almost of fear ran through Hester from head to foot. In the loneliness and quiet of the place, with the woman he loved at his side, Emlyn's fiercely held

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self-control was beginning to slip, and he was beginning to forget — to forget everything save that they two walked side by side through the green shady seclusion of the afternoon light, alone from all the rest of the world; and only one way showed clear before him, the way of his desire — the way a god might go through love and life and fire.

A little wooden flight of steps leads down a short distance in the direction of the cave, to where a bridge spans the ravine. Beyond that there are more steps again going down to the entrance. On this little bridge Hester and Emlyn paused, looking down at the cool ravine and leaning against the railing of the bridge, which latter is cut and inscribed all over with the wanton initials of many a picnic party.

Below them the water ran in a little sleepy trickle, and that with the sound of the wind in the trees was all.

"It's too bad Miss Dolly couldn't come to-day," Emlyn said. His voice suddenly breaking the stillness seemed strange and loud and hollow, and echoed curiously back and forth from the sides of the ravine, while the words themselves, in the face of the tension that was between them, were almost laughable in their triviality.

"Yes," said Hester, "yes, I tried to persuade her to come. But she said she couldn't; it was too soon, she said — too soon after her brother's death." She paused. "She is very loyal in her devotion to his memory," she added.

Again there was silence between them for a moment.

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Then Emlyn put out his hand. He was fighting very hard with himself, and as his last defence he chose to recall the past that stood between them. Slowly his hand advanced toward Hester's as it lay upon the railing. She watched him with a terrified fascination — what was coming?

"And I know that *you* are loyal and devoted too," he said; and for a fleeting moment his fingers touched the little ring on her engagement finger.

Hester's hands tightened wildly upon the rail. For an instant she stood thus, a sudden black giddiness upon her. Then without a word she turned away and sank down upon the steps of the bridge. Her face was white and her eyes were large and tragic.

"Forgive me! Oh forgive me!" cried Emlyn, his heart contracting with a sharp remorse. He stood over her and all his own desire was suddenly lost in the sight of her drawn face.

"Forgive me," he cried again sharply, "forgive me for speaking of it. I was cruel, heartless—" He broke off and stood staring miserably down at her.

Hester was silent for a long moment, looking straight before her. But the truth within her was crying out to be told. At last with an effort she steadied her voice and spoke.

"You are mistaken," she said simply, "I did not love James Calvert."

Her words were so astonishing, so unlooked for, so totally unexpected, that Emlyn stared blankly at her, unable to grasp their meaning.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"You did not love him!" he said almost stupidly.

Hester's hands clutched each other tight in her lap. "No," she cried, "no, I did not love him!" Her eyes were dry and bright and tearless, but her voice broke. "He loved me with — oh, with all his soul — and I thought — I *thought* I loved him too. We had been children together, you know; and we were engaged to be married, but — but when I came home — oh, I found it was all a mistake — my terrible, *terrible* mistake!"

"But you said — I heard you tell Dolly," Emlyn cut in breathlessly.

"I know, oh I know I told her so!" Hester cried. "How could I do anything else? I had to tell her. How could I let her know then I hadn't cared? But it was a lie, and I have been living under it ever since. Everybody thinks I cared for him, but oh, the poor, *poor* boy! I didn't love him, it was all my awful mistake." Her thoughts always went back to that. Her words came rushing and tumbling over each other, her flushed upturned face and great tragic grey eyes fixed upon Emlyn.

For a moment he stood still, then something gave way within him, his soul let go of its self-control. He was caught up on the crest of a great leaping wave of joy. With a cry he sank down beside her and caught both her hands in his.

"Hester, Hester!" he cried, "I love you! I love you with all my heart, with all my soul — with all — *all* that is in me!" He pressed her hands hard against

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his lips. "Sweetheart, sweetheart!" he cried, "do *you* care?"

And looking straight into his eyes Hester said "Yes," just above a whisper.

And in a shining present that forgot the past and shut its eyes to the future, Emlyn gathered her close into his arms.

But in a moment Hester pushed him from her and struggled to her feet.

"Oh, wait," she cried breathlessly, "wait!" She stood away from him midway of the little bridge. "I must tell you — Oh, I must tell you everything," she panted. "The evening before — I've got to tell you, Page — the evening before it happened, James came to me, and I had to tell him the truth — that I didn't care, you know. He minded terribly — oh, *terribly!* And the next day it happened — and — and Mrs. Calvert told me — she told me that night, you know —

"Yes, I know," said Emlyn.

"She told me," Hester went on painfully, "that I killed him — that he committed suicide because — because I didn't love him."

Emlyn caught his breath. "No, no!" he cried out sharply, involuntarily.

"Yes," said Hester, steadily, "yes, that is what she said. And O Page — oh, *perhaps* it is true."

She paused, looking at him, and he returned her gaze in silence.

"I want you to know, to know all the truth," she stumbled on; "you see perhaps I was the cause of one

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man's ruin and —" she broke off piteously. Standing before him she searched his face anxiously, but still Emlyn was silent. In a moment she went on again. Her voice was low, but now there was a certain wildness in it.

"It was my fault, I know — my terrible fault; I shall always know that. But it was a mistake, Page, I didn't — Oh, of course I wasn't *playing* with him! You — you don't think *that*, do you?" she almost whispered.

"No, no, of course not!" said Emlyn, quickly. Yet he was scarcely conscious of her words or of what he answered. He was conscious only of the terrible thing that he had done, and of the fact that she believed herself guilty of James Calvert's death. In the presence of her piteous confession he was brought suddenly back to a realization of his awful secret.

Hester still stood and looked at him, and the rift of silence yawned wider and wider between them. There was nothing more for her to say, and how was Emlyn to say what was crying out to be told?

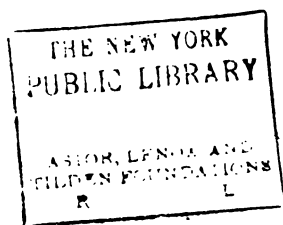
For one brief moment he had let his love have sway, and even in that moment the live past had leaped upon him, as a treacherous wild animal might leap suddenly out of the dark. Must he tell the woman he loved, in what should have been the golden climax of their lives, that he was a murderer? With a faint groan he turned away, putting his hands on the railing of the bridge.

For a moment longer Hester stood thus and looked





The rift of silence yawned wider and wider between them



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at him in silence. Then unseen by him she put up her hands, covering her face with a fleeting tragic gesture. Even as she did so the sound of voices came from the mouth of the cave.

Hester dropped her hands and straightened up very tall and almost imperious.

"Here come the others," she said quietly. "I must go and see that the things are ready," and turning she walked firmly and without haste up the steps of the bridge, along the path and around the bend. But in the depth of her heart she whispered bitterly, "Of course he would feel that way; of course, of course!"

Emlyn still leaned upon the railing of the bridge and watched the dark mouth of the cave disgorge all the gay picnic party who came along the path below, laughing and talking and hallooing to him.

## CHAPTER XX

### ANOTHER CUPID

SINGING their way through all the old familiar tunes dedicated to hay rides, the wagons with their merry party came back to Willoughby through the perfumed sentimental dusk of the evening, with a little thread of new moon in the grey sky. And Hester Rymal in her wagon, and Page Emlyn in his, because they had reason to be the most unhappy of all the company, were to all intents and purposes the very gayest of the gay. And Lottie and Eugene Calvert, because in all probability they were the two very happiest people anywhere for miles and miles around, were unusually quiet, being content with the blissfulness of silence. Once under cover of the pathos of "Weep no more, my lady," Eugene whispered to Lottie, "It's a mighty nice thing to be one of the happiest people in all the world."

To which Lottie flung back softly, "Yes, but it's a nicer thing to be *two* of the happiest people in all the world."

It was later in the evening, when the members of the tired party had all had supper at their respective homes,

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and when the men for the most part, past even the energy required for making calls, sat upon their own front steps smoking comfortably in the summer dusk divested of their coats, while the girls in their cool little rooms were going slowly and lingeringly to bed, indulging in copious applications of cold cream, and general discussion over the party, mingled with exclamations of "Did you ever *see* anything burnt as black as I am?" "O goodness, did you know you'd torn *all* the lace off your ruffle?" that Richard Breeze came up the pathway to the Calverts' house. There was the flicker of a white dress glimpsed at half in the shadow of the honeysuckle that meandered over the porch pillars and railings. Richard steered his course in the direction of the dress. Indeed he steered a large portion of his whole life by the wearer of it.

Dolly greeted him with an unusual heartiness in her pretty child's voice, being anxious to hear more particulars of the picnic. But instead of being glad of the heartiness, it struck Richard bitterly that there never was anything else now in Dolly's tone for him. He felt that before the advent of Page Emlyn to the valley her voice had held for him certain tones and inflections which gave a possible promise of the fulfilment of his hope. Poor Richard! It seemed to him this evening that nothing could be more bright and cold and self-possessed than friendliness.

Eugene was seated on the porch steps when Richard arrived, but in the face of his own happiest day in the world he had consideration for another man's feelings,

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and so with a mocking "I'm sorry, Dick, but I'll have to ask you to excuse me, I've got some studying I just must do to-night," he rose to depart.

"Oh, I'll excuse you all right," Richard returned, not without a certain fierceness. Left alone, he dropped down to the porch step, and Dolly rocked slowly back and forth in her chair, the wicker of which whispered to itself. And as she rocked, shadow and starlight played softly and faintly over her hair and ran up and down her white dress. In the yard a tree-toad or two called cheerfully to one another, and somewhere in the meadows on the outskirts of Willoughby a whippoorwill kept up his breathlessly monotonous remarks. The grass had been cut on the lawn that day and the touch of the heavy dew wrung from it a dying breath of poignant sweetness.

Richard was silent for so long that at last Dolly broke the stillness herself a little impatiently. "Well, Dick," she said, "aren't you going to tell me about the picnic? Did you have a good time?"

"No," said Richard, uncompromisingly.

"Why, Dick!" cried Dolly; "why, Mr. Emlyn said it was a very pleasant picnic, and Gene said it was just the nicest one he was ever on. Gene said too," she added with a little giggle, "that you and Tessie Bedinger had a lot of fun together."

"Gene lied then," said Richard, briefly.

"Oh-h!" cried Dolly, scandalized at his words.

"And as for Tessie Bedinger," Richard went on viciously, "she hasn't got any more sense than *that*,"

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and he measured off an infinitely small portion of his little finger.

"Why *Dick!*" cried Dolly, "you musn't talk so about Tessie. She's my *friend*, and I won't have you speak that way about her." Dolly was quite fierce and commanding in her pretty vehemence.

"All right, then, Dolly, I won't," said Richard, immediately capitulating. "Miss Teresa Bedinger is one of the most radiantly beautiful, the most dazzlingly accomplished, and the most deeply intellectual young ladies that it has ever been my misfortune to meet." He rose and bowed in the remote direction of the Bedinger homestead. "I take off my hat to her," he continued, "and in spirit I toss her innumerable bouquets of — er-er of appreciation through the perfumed silence of the night."

"Dick, are you crazy?" cried Dolly. "What's the matter with you to-night anyway?"

Richard resumed his seat on the steps at her feet.

"Dolly," he said, "there's just one thing the matter with me, or ever has been, or ever will be the matter with me, and that is that I love you, that I love you with all my heart."

Dolly drew back with a little quick movement into the depths of her chair and Richard rushed on.

"And that I always shall love you, Dolly. Of course you know it — everybody must know it, and I'm glad and proud and happy that everybody on earth should know it — should know that I love the sweetest little girl in all the world. If I never have anything else in

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my life to be proud of, I can always feel that it was something to have loved a girl like you. And I always *shall* love you, dearest, I always shall — no matter what happens; but — ” and there was a sudden wistfulness in his voice, — “but I’m getting mighty tired of waiting, and I wish somehow I could hear you say you cared a little bit for me.”

Dolly put up her little hands with a quick deprecation. “O Dick, don’t, *don’t!*” she cried.

“Couldn’t you say it, darling, couldn’t you?” he begged.

But in the depths of her chair Dolly shook her head, “No, Dick, no!” she said quite positively, “I couldn’t.”

“Try,” Richard whispered; “just try once, sweetheart.”

But Dolly still shook her head.

“O Dick, I like you, I like you just awfully,” she said, “but I don’t love you and I never shall. So please, *please* don’t ever speak of it again. I — I’m your *friend* always,” she said, “but I know I shall never *love* you.”

Dolly was young, and she was cruel with the bright, self-centred cruelty of youth.

“Dolly,” said Richard, steadily, “please tell me if you love somebody else.”

“O Dick!” she said almost impatiently, “that’s such a silly question; of course I don’t!” but even as she spoke there was a little note of agitation in her reply.

“Dearest,” said Richard, “you needn’t be afraid to tell me. O little sweetheart,” he went on softly, “I’m



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not much of a fellow I know, but I do think I've learned how to love pretty well, and whatever's worth anything in me has come from you — from my love for you. I do think love is one of the very greatest educations a fellow can have — and Dolly I care so much that even if you told me you loved somebody else I could stand it — I think I could stand it, if I thought you would be happy."

"But I tell you I *don't* love anybody else, of course I don't!" Dolly protested vehemently. "And — and anyway," she cried, "you've no *right* to ask me such a question!" On the last words, in spite of herself, her voice broke and she sprang to her feet.

"O dearest, dearest, forgive me," said Richard, sadly, and started up too. But Dolly evaded him quickly, and without a word fled away into the dark seclusion of the house.

For a little while Richard stood upon the porch and waited, then with a sharp breath between a sigh and groan he went heavily down the steps and turned along the path, walking unseeingly.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE OPENING OF A DOOR

PAGE EMLYN walked down the garden path from the Calverts' house, down the main street of Willoughby, giving an occasional absent greeting now and then to chance acquaintances, and so came at last to his office building. It was morning, the morning after Hester's picnic party, and the morning after a great many things for Emlyn. Though it was only nine o'clock, already it was hot and still with the bright stillness of an opening summer day. The line of trees on either side of the street had stretched their green leaves to their widest and fullest extent, and their shade made deep blotches of shadow upon the road, a tunnel of green coolness down which the pedestrians went gratefully.

Emlyn entered the dark of his office building and went up the worn and, it must be admitted, decidedly dirty stairs, and unlocking the door passed in. In the face of everything that had happened the still blankness of the room with its familiar shut-up morning smell held a curious significance. There was a vague sense present that, given the right personality, the room might find itself the setting for a career of reality and activity. The setting that it had been, for instance,

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for James Calvert's life. Emlyn had a sudden curious feeling that his surroundings, the furniture, and the blank stare of the room resented his presence because a genuine life was what they demanded.

He went wearily over to the windows and, raising them one after another, stood at length by the last one looking out and trying to grasp the situation. All at once the thing he had planned to do was becoming impossible. He put his head against the window frame with an oppressed, almost an exhausted gesture. Had he made a terrible mistake, and spurred on by remorse attempted an atonement which was out of all reason? Or, a sharper question, could it be, in his fear of confession, he had tricked himself into the belief that he was doing a better thing by keeping silence? That what he had believed to be the epitome of atonement had in reality been simply a shield held up between himself and all that confession would have brought upon him? The impossibility of his position seemed daily to be gripping him tighter and tighter in some fresh revelation. There was always the horrible gratitude of the Calverts to be faced. Then since his ride with Richard to Uncle Billy Chester's his eyes had been opened to another danger, and now he knew that Hester was bearing a burden of contrition to which she had no right. The thumb-screws of truth were clamping themselves upon him very tight. The situation was untrue, was unnatural, and was therefore impossible, and had been impossible from the very first had he only had the eyes to see it. The desire for truth was

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upon him, he was consumed with a longing for what was real, what was sincere; to be himself once more and not the secret impersonator of another's life — to be himself even though that self were a murderer. Yet offsetting all this passion for honesty was the necessary consideration for Eugene Calvert's career. If he took the truth upon him now, it must throw Eugene back in his medical course. All night long Emlyn had tossed back and forth arguing with himself as to what was right and what was wrong, and now in the morning, dazed by sleeplessness, and confused by the perpetual question, his mind was almost exhausted, and the power of decision seemed slipping from him.

As he stood thus, his head leaning against the window frame, his thoughts tearing him first this way and then that, there came an uncertain knock at the door behind him.

"Come in," said Emlyn, turning round and putting the confusion of his mind determinately from him.

The door pushed slowly open, and slowly a sun-bonneted woman entered. With the same slowness, which was marked by a certain quiet and detachment of manner, she closed the door softly behind her, and then facing around swept her sunbonnet from her head. It was Maria Crocroft.

"Howdy," she said simply.

A sudden choking surge of fear leaped in Emlyn's throat. Her appearance was so sudden, so absolutely unexpected, and, as always, so tense and strange. What was she doing here? She belonged back there in the

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remote mountains — there near the Raven Rocks, there with his secret and the past. For a moment Emlyn stared at her stupidly.

"Why, how do you do, Mrs. Crocroft," he said at length. Scarcely knowing what he did, he shook hands with her and pushed forward a chair mechanically.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

"Much obliged," she answered, and sank down into the chair. There followed a pause of silence between them. Her quiet inscrutable eyes travelled slowly around the office, and then centring at last on one of the windows, she sat staring out of that and not speaking.

Emlyn sat down in his desk chair and waited. But still she did not speak, and at last, constrained by the city training which is embarrassed by long silence, Emlyn began.

"I hope you are quite well," he said awkwardly.

"I'm well as common," she returned. For a moment as she answered her eyes flitted from the window to rest upon his face, and then she looked away again.

"I suppose you came over from your home last night," he went on.

"No, I come this mornin' — it's er right smart walk."

"You walked all the way from the Sweet Run Hollow this morning!" he exclaimed in surprise. "You must be very tired; why, you would have to start before daylight."

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"No," she said, "it gits light right soon these mornin's, sometime long about four o'clock."

Again there was silence between them, and again Emlyn hunted through his mind for a fresh topic. But she was the first to break the silence this time.

"They tells me there's er big prayer-meetin' goin' on over in here now," she said. And it struck Emlyn unaccountably that now in her turn she was making conversation even as he had done.

"Yes," he assented, "yes, it's been going on for a week or more. The Methodists are holding it. I suppose you came over for that," he added, his mind still hunting involuntarily for the reason of her advent.

"No," she said briefly, "I didn't come fer that; I low to go back this afternoon."

Emlyn was baffled. But after another moment of hesitation she spoke again.

"I come over," she said, "to git me er few little tricks at the store."

She paused, looking at him inquiringly, and still there seemed something hidden in her manner. Emlyn felt she was searching his face to see if he would believe her statement, and immediately he registered it in his own mind as not being the truth.

She turned her eyes away from his face and again they sought the window. After a moment, still not looking at him, she said quite suddenly and unemotionally.

"Sonny's dead."

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"*What!*" cried Emlyn, startled into question, though he had heard the words distinctly enough.

"Sonny's dead," she repeated. And her voice and words were perfectly expressionless.

"Oh I am sorry!" cried Emlyn, instinctively. "I am very sorry!"

"He died last week," she said. "It was the fever—" she paused. "All the folks said," she went on presently, "that I ought to be glad he was took, him bein' like he was, but —" she dropped her voice and her gaze fell to her quiet hands in her lap, "but he was jest all I had," she said. Suddenly with the words her mouth twisted sharply down and she bit her lips, and as the quiver of the muscles steadied themselves, presently, slowly and painfully, the great bright tears began to roll down her cheeks. She took up her apron in her thin hands and wiped them away. "He was jest the prettiest little baby I ever did see," she said.

The tears rushed into Emlyn's own eyes, and he felt a sharp contraction of his throat.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" he cried again.

He burned with an impotent pity, and an imperious rage against himself that he should stand there a witness to this other human being's suffering, and have no strength or comfort to offer her. He raged against the loneliness of human nature, and against his own incapacity. It seemed to him in a flash of thought that all the education that he had received, and all his supposed advantages of birth and upbringing, were less than useless if they could not now give some com-

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fort to this unhappy soul who had had none of them. It was the old sharp obligation of strength for weakness — of knowledge for ignorance. But in all his fervour of sympathy there seemed so little that he could do or say. Yet it came to him suddenly, that no matter how trivial, how useless his words might appear, it was his bounden duty to give them utterance.

He drew up a chair beside her, and sitting down laid his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"I am so sorry for you," he repeated.

The words were almost childish in their simplicity, but indeed in the clutch of the overwhelming calamities of the universe, what are people anyway save children?

Maria Crocroft took her apron down presently from her face. She was still biting her lips painfully to steady them, and the slow tears kept dragging their way down her cheeks. At length, however, she gathered strength to speak, looking straight up into his face.

"I'm — I'm much erbliged to yer," she faltered, "yer — yer the only one to say you was sorry fer me. All ther — other folks seemed to think I must be glad."

Even as she gave expression to her gratitude her self-control gave way once more, and with a little poignant sob she buried her face in her hands. Yet even now her grief was not violent and noisy. It seemed confined deep within her meagre body which shook and trembled all over.

Again Emlyn was wrung by his passion of sympathy. Again his hand pressed her shoulder gently.

"It is terrible for you — you seem to have had such



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a hard — such an awful life. I wish from my heart there was anything in all the world that I could do or say to make it easier for you.”

He paused a moment. He seemed to himself like one groping through the dark, or rather he seemed to be pushing the dark back little by little with his words. He did not know what he was going to say next, yet he spoke each word as it came into his mind, realizing perhaps that grief is not usually critical as to the expression of the sympathy offered it.

“You have suffered terribly, and it must seem now as though there were no reason for it, and yet,” he said, going slowly as he felt his way through the dark, “I do believe there must be a reason that we cannot understand, but which will make everything all right in the end, if we will just trust and be brave.”

He broke off. O Heavens! he cried to himself, what was the good of words?

But suddenly she had taken her hands down from her face, and was gazing up at him with vivid hungry eyes.

“Oh!” she cried, eagerly, painfully, and now it was one human soul speaking direct to another, with all the barriers of sex and environment broken down; “Oh, do you reckon that’s true — what the Bible says about not er sparrer fallin’ to the ground, an’ love, an’ all that — Oh, do you reckon it’s true sure nuff?” she begged. “Do you b’lieve it?”

“I believe — ” Emlyn began slowly, groping his way as it were; but there he paused struck into silence by a

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mocking devil of doubt and self-distrust. What, after all, did he believe? What practices of belief had he ever exercised himself in that he could call upon now? He stopped in confusion. Yet even as he did so certain words leaped suddenly forth from the dark of his mind and seemed to speak themselves.

"I believe it with all my soul," he said. And in the saying of the words, on the instant he knew that he believed them. It was as though the pressure of the other's need had all at once forced open a door into his own soul.

At his words a white illumination went over the woman's strained and waiting face.

"Oh," she cried painfully, "*Oh*, I certainly *am* glad you b'lieve it! I've had so much sufferin' an' so much trouble an' all — an' somehow livin' back ther in the mountains all to yer self like, yer git sorter — sorter stray an' lost — like yer'd broke loose from everything — an' I jest didn't know *what* to b'lieve. But if you say it's so, why, I jest reckon it must be, 'cause," she said with a wistful confidence, "you've got education, an' have been round places an' know erbout things." She paused a moment. "Yer do b'lieve it?" she appealed once more.

"I do believe it," Emlyn returned firmly and steadily, looking straight at her. And again the words which he uttered for her gave birth to something new and strong within himself.

"I do believe it," he repeated. "And I believe, too," he went on very simply, for by now all the acquired

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veneer of artificiality had melted away in the exigencies of reality; "that you are going to be brave — that God is going to give you courage and strength to bear what has come to you."

She looked straight up at him for a moment, her face, for all its age and weariness, singularly childlike and trustful and illumined.

"I will be brave," she said steadily. "I kin stand it if I b'lieve all what the Bible says. I uster b'lieve 'fore everything got so terrible, an' I reckon I kin ergin if you say it's true."

"It is true," Emlyn repeated firmly.

"Oh, I'm glad — I'm *glad* it's true!" she cried rejoicingly. And he felt the sharp pathos of her absolute faith in his words as coming from a being superior to herself in education and knowledge.

"Do you reckon —" she paused painfully; "*Oh*, do you reckon it'll be all right for Sonny? He — he didn't know what was right and what was wrong, yer know."

"I am sure it will be," said Emlyn. "I am perfectly sure it will."

She looked at him a little longer, evidently pondering his words, and gradually a certain gladness and tranquillity grew in her eyes. But when she spoke again she seemed to be concerned with something else.

"You look real well," she said, "aire yer gettin' along all right?"

"Why, yes, yes indeed, I'm all right," Emlyn returned, baffled and surprised by her sudden change.

She rose to her feet. "Well," she said, "I reckon

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I must be travellin' now. I jest lowed I'd come in an' see how you was makin' it."

She turned from him toward the door, and Emlyn felt that an intangible curtain of reserve had dropped between them again, and again he knew that she had not told him her real reason for coming.

"But wait," he cried quickly; "isn't there something I can do for you? Didn't you want to see me about something?"

"No," she said hastily, almost sharply. "No, there ain't nothin'." She held out her hand. "Good-by," she said, "I'm much erbliged ter yer." And turning away abruptly she was gone, and Emlyn was left staring at the door, mystified and surprised. That she had come for a reason which in the end she had not divulged he was sure. Yet what could it have been? And how strange she was! Emlyn scarcely knew what strangeness, loneliness and tragedy are capable of working in a woman — or in a man either, for that matter.

As he turned to his desk and seated himself, pondering over Maria Crocroft's unnatural personality, he began too to be astonished at himself. He had not known what possibilities lay within himself until he had called upon them in his compassion for this woman's necessity. In the stress of this other's need he had opened a door into his own inner consciousness, and once it had opened for her it was opened for himself as well, and his thoughts, stretched and widened as they had been for Maria Crocroft, applied themselves again to his own situation. Hester Rymal was suffering from

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a contrition which was really his to bear. From the open door of his soul there poured a flood of truth and illuminating determination, and what he should do as regarded Hester, he knew of a sudden unmistakably.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE WAYS OF LOVE

"HESTER, you don't seem to have much of an appetite this evening. What's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

Cousin Lizzie looked anxiously across the supper table at Hester as she spoke, a loss of appetite being in her estimation one of the most alarming of symptoms.

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you, Cousin Lizzie," the girl returned in a tone which was affectionate, but which failed a little somehow of its attempt at cheerfulness.

"Well, do try and eat something," Cousin Lizzie begged. "Here, try this little piece of chicken, it's mighty nice and tender."

"No, Cousin Lizzie, thank you, I'm all right, but I don't feel very hungry this evening," Hester returned. Her eyes looked unusually large and dark and her cheeks had lost a little of their accustomed wild-rose colour.

Cousin Lizzie looked at her critically for a moment. "I believe that old picnic was too much for you yesterday," she went on a little accusingly, for she was inclined to take people to task who over-tired themselves. Never having had to think of her own body, she took

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care of other people's with a rigorous unselfish jealousy.

"Perhaps. It was rather a long drive," Hester assented, and the little devil that always prompted her to play to Cousin Lizzie's expectations made her speak now in a voice hinting at bodily fatigue.

The Judge shot a quick look at her. It did not seem very likely to him that a mere picnic could fatigue her splendid young body. Hester returned his look, and though she would have been glad to have him believe also that she was merely tired, yet with his understanding eyes upon her, she could not help for the life of her a faint smile. It was not often that she succeeded in deceiving her father, which was a fortunate thing, for those ladies may count themselves happy indeed who possess at least one human being out of all the world whom they can not hoodwink.

Hester rose from the supper table. "It's hot in here," she said, putting up her hand with a little involuntary gesture to shade her eyes from the glare of the kerosene lamp. "I think, if you'll excuse me, Cousin Lizzie, I'll go out to the porch."

She passed quietly from the dining-room, the delicate pink ruffles of her organdy following her softly, and went out to the coolness and peace of the porch.

Emmy and Lottie Breeze were taking supper that night with Dorothy Calvert, so that the Rymals were alone.

Hester sat down upon the top step and let the fresh illusive mantle of the night, with its fleeting breeze,

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its perfumes, its twinkle of stars, and its soft faint sounds, enshroud her soul. She was very unhappy, and it seemed to her that all her unhappiness was bred of that first fatal mistake of hers, the mistake which carried with it always such a live flame of remorse.

Bob, her collie, came slowly over to her, and stood patiently near by, not trying to kiss her, but just assuring her of his affectionate regard by his loyal presence. Hester put her arm about him and pulled at his long hair absently.

Presently the Judge came out also and sat down in a deep rocking-chair not far from his daughter. Hester moved a little and laid her head against his knee. It was good to have the comfort of a father's knee to lean against. The Judge put his large quiet hand down and stroked her hair softly.

"If one were unhappy about anything and wanted to tell one's father," he suggested.

Hester rubbed her head against his knee in a little grateful caress, but she said, "It might be a thing one couldn't tell one's father."

"Not one's own *father*?" the Judge persisted, still with his tender hand upon her hair.

"Not even one's own *father*," Hester returned, though she laughed a little, drearily.

There was silence between them then. Hester stared away into the dark, while perhaps the Judge thought, with a sudden stab, that though one might not be able to tell one's father, perhaps if one's mother were alive it might have been different.



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Presently there came a sharp click at the garden gate, and a dark shape approached along the pathway.

"Judge," came Cousin Lizzie's warning voice from the back porch.

"Beaux!" the Judge whispered, as he rose hastily to depart. Cousin Lizzie had trained him carefully, and very well he knew that a father's place of a summer evening was on the back porch rather than on the front. As he disappeared into the house, Page Emlyn's figure resolved itself out of the gloom and paused before Hester.

Hester's whole inward being gave a great leap of astonishment at the sight of him, and she started quickly to her feet. Yet when she spoke her voice was natural and calm enough.

"Why, Mr. Emlyn, how do you do?" she said, and held out her hand. "Won't you sit down?" she added; and now, in spite of her calmness, her heart was beating with a wild excitement.

Emlyn came up the steps and sat down in one of the rocking-chairs on the porch, and for a moment there was silence between them. On the girl's part it was a tense waiting silence. On the man's it was the silence of desperation. He was letting go, little by little, of the possibilities of life, and going with the seconds into the dark — into the wilderness, into the waste places of the world, where the souls of outcasts go.

At last he spoke, and the sound of his own voice meant to him that now his irretrievable step was taken.

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"I must tell you—" he said, and broke off. "I came to tell you —" he began again, and again he paused. His throat felt very tight and dry.

"Yes?" said Hester in a half whisper, "yes?"

Emlyn drew a deep breath and went on again doggedly.

"It is so awful for you to believe that — to believe what you told me yesterday, that I came to tell you — I must tell you, it is not true," he said.

"Not true?" she questioned, for she did not understand him.

"No, it is not true, what Mrs. Calvert told you — that you — that James Calvert committed suicide."

Hester caught her breath in a sharp gasp, and a rush of happiness thrilled her from head to foot. She sprang to her feet and stood eagerly before him. In the faint light he could see her hands pressed hard against her breast.

"Oh!" she cried breathlessly, "Oh, Mr. Emlyn, are you telling me the truth? Are you sure — *sure* it is true?" she begged.

"It is true, perfectly true," Emlyn said steadily, speaking from the waste places.

Hester sank back into her chair once more. She felt as though she were caught in an almost tangible flood of happiness and relief. Until it was lifted from her soul she had not realized how the horrible thought had pressed upon her.

"Oh, I am so glad — so *glad!*" she whispered, and there was a little tremulous quiver in her voice which

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was almost a sob. "But how do you know, how can you be sure, perfectly sure?" she persisted.

"There is no doubt about it, I am perfectly sure," Emlyn returned.

She leaned back in her chair drawing a deep breath and taking hold of the peace and relief that filled her soul.

"Oh!" she cried at length, "Oh, you've changed the whole face of my universe!" She paused a moment and then she added, "You can't imagine what it is to think yourself a murderer for months and months."

Emlyn made no reply to that.

Hester was silent a little longer, taking hold of the whole happy realization of it. At last she spoke again.

"Of course you were there — I had forgotten," she said. "I never heard the details, I would not let any one tell me — but now I think — I *want* you to tell me — I want to know how it really happened. It seems so impossible to think of his slipping over a cliff like that, poor boy!"

In the dark Emlyn could see her lean eagerly toward him. And now there was nothing between them, nothing to prevent him from saying that it was all an accident, and then in the consummation of his love take her in his arms and go the way a god might go. That, all along, had been the keen temptation of it. There never had been any reason for his actions, save the sharp reason of his own conscience.

For a long moment he hesitated, looking down the road of desire, but afterwards, with the hopeless stub-

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born courage which sometimes comes to those in the waste places of desolation, he drew a deep breath and spoke.

"He did not slip over," he said steadily, "he was pushed over."

"*Pushed* over!" cried Hester, starting erect, "*murdered!*"

Emlyn nodded. "Yes," he said.

"Oh no, no!" she cried, "Oh *no* — it couldn't have been! Who could have done such a thing?" She whispered the last question, wringing her hands together tight in her lap.

Emlyn felt the world surge away from him, and he stood alone in an immense isolation. Yet still he spoke steadily. "I did it," he said.

For a long moment Hester did not move. There lay between them a frightened, terrified silence. Then she caught her breath sharply.

"What — Oh, *what* did you say!" she cried hoarsely, her voice feeling its way out of the dark.

"I pushed James Calvert over the cliffs — I am a murderer."

Emlyn said the words from far away in a monotonous voice. He had said them so often in his own mind that now it was only a step further to speak them aloud.

"You — you are," she struggled to say, "Oh, what do you mean —" she broke off piteously.

"It is true," Emlyn repeated drearily, mechanically. "I murdered James Calvert."

But even as he spoke the words, all the youth and

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sanity of Hester's nature sprang up suddenly in a wild rebellion.

"It is *not* true!" she cried fiercely. "It can't be true, I tell you! You *couldn't* do such a thing — it is an impossibility." She leaped to her feet and stood over him imperiously. "It is not true!" she cried again wildly. "Do you hear me, it is *not* true! You have deceived yourself, been fooled! It is some awful mistake. It is not possible for you to have done such a thing — and it is not true — I *know* it is not true!" She beat her hands softly and vehemently together in her passionate denial.

Emlyn rose quickly to his feet and caught her little frantic hands in his.

"Hester! Hester!" he cried brokenly, "I was drunk. I did not know what I was doing."

She stood a second staring at him through the dusk. "Drunk," she cried at length, "*drunk?*" Her voice was low and horrified.

"Yes, drunk," Emlyn answered.

"*Drunk!*" Hester began to laugh wildly, terribly. "*Drunk!*" she cried "Oh, think of a Calvert being killed by drink somebody else took!" She laughed and laughed, a strange shrill mirth which broke suddenly into an agony of tears.

Emlyn put her gently back into her chair.

"O poor child — poor, poor little child!" he said in an agony of remorse.

Hester pushed him sharply away, her hands almost beating him.

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"Oh, don't, don't *touch* me — how can you dare!" she cried breathlessly, desperately, her voice stumbling away into silence again.

Emlyn stood back from her; he could feel her shrinking revulsion in the dark like a tangible thing. For a moment he looked wistfully down at her. Yet what in all the world could he say? There were no words left for him now, only silence.

"You will go away — *please*," she said at last.

An instant longer he paused, then he said, "Yes, I will go," in a hardly audible voice, and without a word, without a touch, he turned and went down the steps and away into the gloom.

His head was bent, and he walked steadily, blindly, doggedly along, down the path, through the gate, and out into the broad deserted road leading to Willoughby. He had touched the very cold forsaken depths of desolation. He paused at length, standing still and looking down the dim faint stretch of the road, and away to the twinkle of lights in the distance which spoke of the village. There was light and life, and there he had friends. But what right had he to any of these things, to any existence anywhere? He had forfeited his own life, and he could not carry out the other man's. And now where should he go, where was there any path for him out of all the world? His own life was gone, and James Calvert's was gone. Nowhere in any remote corner of the earth was there a life left for him. He went slowly and brokenly over to the side of the road, and sitting down buried his face in his hands.

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And for the first time the black devil of suicide came stealing up to sit down on the road beside him, and to stare at him with terrible leering eyes. With his face still cowering away in his hands he groaned softly and deeply. In the stillness about him there was suddenly a faint rustle, and the sound of a low sob. Emlyn raised his head with a start, and there in the dim starlight he saw Hester standing before him. She was panting from running and she was crying. Emlyn leaped to his feet.

"*Hester!*" he cried.

She put out her shaking hands and touched his arm.

"Oh," she sobbed, "Oh! God have mercy on us — I may be wrong — I may be awful — but — but — but, Page, I came, I came after you — I couldn't let you go away like *that* — because — Oh, because I love you," she faltered.

"*Darling!*" he cried sharply, and tried to draw her to him. But she struggled free of his embrace.

"No, no!" she panted, "not that, Page. We've — we've — Oh, you know we've lost our happiness because of our sins."

"Not *your* sins, dearest, only mine," Emlyn cried poignantly.

"What is yours is mine now — it's got to be mine through all eternity." Her voice was low and steady, but she put up her hand to her throat as though she choked. "I — I love you, Page," she said again. "And it's for better or for worse, and for — for ever and ever." She buried her face in her hands for a moment, and

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Emlyn stood beside her in a rage of remorse and contrition.

"I came after you," she went on presently. "I ran — I *couldn't* let you go away alone in the dark. I had to let you know, it was — it was *my* sin, *my* suffering too." She paused, catching her breath. "Oh, it's terrible — it's *awful*, unspeakably awful! But — but — dearest, it's my trouble too — and I had to let you know that, to let you know that I know the — the awfulness of your struggle, and that you're not struggling all alone, Page."

"O my God, Hester!" Emlyn cried, "*don't* — you mustn't — I won't let you —"

"You cannot help it, Page," she said. And suddenly her voice was steady and brave. "It is all terrible — *awful* and terrible. We can't evade it — but you have got to understand that it is mine too. And we — *we*, dearest," she whispered softly, "we have got to be brave. We mustn't see each other any more, and you will go away now as soon as you can from Wiloughby. But you know — I want you to know — to be *sure* — that from now on your struggles are mine. That wherever you go, whatever you do — whatever you decide to do — my love is always, *always* with you — and my prayers will be with you too."

Emlyn groaned. "O Hester, my dearest, dearest," he cried brokenly, "I don't see how it is possible for anyone to be like you."

"I don't see how it is possible for anyone to be any other way, when — when they *care*," she answered.



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She came closer to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Dear," she whispered, "I do not know how it all happened — how it *could* have happened. But I know — whatever you may have been before — that now you are a brave man walking in God's sight, and that you will have the courage to do whatever your conscience points out to you." She paused a fraction of a moment. "I *know* it, Page," she repeated steadily. Then she said, "Tell me all about it, please."

She made a movement toward the little embankment by the side of the road, and Emlyn took off his coat quickly and spread it down on the ground for her to sit on.

"Hester," he said sharply, and paused. "O my God!" he burst out, "I did not know there was such a woman in the world!"

"Oh — oh, *don't!*" she cried sharply.

He sank down on the bank at her side, and now at last his long held self-control was beaten down, and his breath came in terrible deep sobs.

"O Hester — Hester — " he could hardly articulate the words. "I have been a murderer for eight months."

Tears went down Hester's own cheeks very fast, but in spite of her emotion she put out her hand and laid it upon his bowed head, with a strong, a steady, a miraculous touch. It seemed to Page Emlyn as though that touch would have drawn him up from the very depths of hell itself; as though the girl beside him had all at once taken, as of her right, all the stored motherhood, all the wifeness, of the ages, becoming something

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miraculous, something infinitely strong, infinitely wise. It was her sudden inheritance of womanhood. Once she said, "God will help us — He *will* help us, Page." But except for that she did not speak. But the wonderful touch of her hand on his head drew him gradually up and up out of the depths of despair and back once more to his restored self-control.

He raised his head at last, and taking her hand in both of his he clung to it desperately, kissing it again and again.

"Oh, you — you *miraculous* woman!" he cried brokenly.

"Tell me now, please," she said, "how it all happened."

Her voice was very brave, and her wonderful personality sustained and held him, and at her bidding, stumbly, wearily, he went through the terrible narrative. Once or twice she interrupted him.

"Had you been drunk before?" she asked once.

"Never," he answered.

"You did not know how strong the whiskey was," she said again.

"No — but that is a baby's excuse," he added bitterly.

A little later she said eagerly, quickly — "Then you took the drink, the one that made the difference, because you were sorry for Haymer?"

At the end she broke in again, "You do not remember — you say you do not remember anything of it?"

"Absolutely nothing," he said.

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"Then you *couldn't* have done it! O Page, you *couldn't* have done it — don't you see you couldn't? Nobody could do a thing like that and not know it."

Her little eager fingers tightened upon his.

"O dearest, *don't!*" he cried sharply. "I thought that too — I thought it couldn't be true. I hoped and prayed that it wasn't. But I went to the old woman, to Maria Crocroft — I thought — I tried to think — she was blackmailing me. But she wasn't — she didn't want money. She told me all over again — there's no mistake about it, it's true, Hester."

There was a pause between them.

"And then?" she said.

"Then," Emlyn went on, his voice grown steady by now. "I fought it all out alone in the woods, and I decided there was no way but to confess. I came down out of the hollow and rode back to Willoughby with every intention of confessing —" He paused. "I should like you to believe that, Hester, to believe that I did mean to confess — please believe it, dearest," he said.

"I believe you, Page," she said quickly, "of course I believe you."

"But as it fell out, I couldn't," he went on. "Eugene Calvert came over to the hotel, and asked me if I could get him some work so that he could earn money enough to go on with his medical course, and I was so glad — so happy that there was something I could do for any of them, that before I realized what it would mean I had arranged to lend him the money. And it was only

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afterwards I saw that that must put a stop to my confession. But then it came to me all at once that there was another thing I might do. I might come here to Willoughby, and take up James' life, and do all I could for the Calverts, just — just as he would have done."

"Then you have been living his life all these months?" she whispered. "O Page, how *could* you do it?"

"I don't know," he said. He put his hand drearily up to his forehead. "It has been terrible. Lately I have come to think it was all wrong, terribly wrong. But at the time it seemed the only thing I could do. But it is awful, their gratitude —" He broke off. "O Hester," he appealed, "was I wrong — did I fool myself into thinking it was right because I was afraid to confess? And what ought I to do now? Tell me what I ought to do," he begged.

"I cannot tell you, Page," she said gently. "But if you are honest, your own self — your best self will tell you, and *whatever* it tells you, I know—" she paused and there was a fine confidence in her voice, "I *know* that you will do it," she said.

She rose to her feet, and for a moment they faced each other out there in the starlight of the road. He still held her hand fast, though he was strong and quiet now.

"It's — it's got to be good-by now, dear," she said, her voice breaking to silence.

He kissed her. "Yes," he said steadily, "I know it is good-by."

"And remember," her words picked up their stum-

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bling way again in the chaos of the dark, "remember I love you always — always."

Emlyn's fingers clutched hers tight.

"And," she went on, "there is a God, you know Page, that does care—Oh, I know there is!" she cried.

"Dearest," he said, "I know it too."

"Good-by," she whispered, raising her face to his. Stooping he kissed her softly.

"Good-by," he said, his love and admiration and remorse having no adjective left for her.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### UNCLE BILLY AS FATE

BACK and forth, back and forth, Emlyu paced his narrow office. It was the day after his parting with Hester, and now in the afternoon, having no particular press of business to steady his thoughts, he was fighting the tragic realization of it all. Last night her fine courage and the knowledge of her love had sustained and strengthened him, but now in the clear hot daylight it seemed to him that nothing was true save the fact that they were separated forever, and the agony of his remorse that he should have dragged the bright happy wings of her personality down into the slough of his own misery. He had meant simply to release her from the belief that she had caused James Calvert's death, but instead his zeal had brought her into the clutch of a far keener unhappiness.

The terrible feeling of a caged animal was upon him again, and he felt a frantic wild desire to break his bonds and to be free — to escape. But where or how was there any escape for him? The past, like a pursuing animal, was forever on his track. Yet though there was no escape for him from his remorse, one thing was certain, he must leave Willoughby. For Hester's

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sake, for his own, he could no longer stay here carrying out the false position which he had essayed. Hester had said that his own best self would tell him what to do, and in the clarifying light of her words he knew at last that the present situation was an impossible one, and had been so even from the very first: a fact which he might have known all along if he had not permitted his contrition to blind his eyes to the truth. He must go away; there was no evasion from that fact at least. On Eugene's account he could not confess, though it seemed to him now in his sharp desire for the truth that confession was the only thing which could bring peace to his soul. He thought that he would have been happy and glad to stand forth before the world of Willoughby and take upon his shoulders in the sight of all the load of his guilt. For that was the reality, that was the truth, and that he believed was what he desired. It seemed to him that from the very first Fate had been pushing him steadily, inexorably, toward the truth, and that nothing short of that would ever satisfy her.

So Page Emlyn paced up and down his office and grappled with the questions which rushed upon him, while across the hallway in the office opposite Richard Breeze sat at his desk and looked fixedly out of the window. His forehead was ridged into two deep scowling lines of thought, and his white teeth bit viciously upon the handle of a brown business pen. He had sat thus for some time, staring out at the window, biting his pen, or dropping his eyes to scribble

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idle figures upon the desk blotter before him, watching the tracing of them with absent-minded care. Yet no one of these methods seemed to bring any relief to his perplexity.

"Oh, the *devil*!" he cried out at last, flinging the brown pen down so fiercely upon his desk that it bounded off on to the floor and scattered away into a far corner.

"Well, stay there then, I don't care!" Richard said, addressing it irritably, in case the pen should be deriving any satisfaction from its escape into the corner.

For a moment or two after this ebullition he sat staring straight before him, his hands thrust deep into his pockets and the scowl of thought still deep between his eyes. Then with a shake of determination he jumped to his feet and went resolutely across the hallway to Page Emlyn's office.

Emlyn paused in his restless pacing to and fro at Richard's entrance and greeted him. "Hello, Dick," he said, "come in. Sit down and be sociable," he added with an effort at lightness.

He himself sat down at his desk and regarded the other, his head leaning upon his hand.

Richard, however, did not respond to the lightness, nor did he sit down. Instead he looked squarely at Emlyn for a moment and then leaped straight at his point.

"Emlyn," he said, "you remember what I spoke to you about the day we went to see old Uncle Billy Chester?"



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Emlyn was silent a moment, trying to force his weary mind back into the past, then suddenly he flushed.

"Yes," he said, "I remember."

"Well, it's just as I told you," Richard said.

"Just as you told me?" Emlyn questioned.

"Why, yes,—that Dolly Calvert is in love with you," the other returned impatiently.

Emlyn received the news in silence. His head still rested upon his hand, and looking down he played with the things upon the desk.

"I suppose you are perfectly sure of what you say?" he said at length.

"Perfectly sure," said Richard, his clear brown eyes regarding the other inexorably. "Well?" he said after a pause.

"Well?" Emlyn returned interrogatively.

"*Well!* what are you going to do about it?" Richard persisted sharply.

Emlyn drew a long breath, almost, in fact, a groan, and looked down at his hands playing idly with the pens before him. Great Heavens! he thought, what a mess he had made of the whole thing!

"Well, Dick," he said at last, "I'm awfully sorry, terribly sorry about it, but as I told you I have never made love to her—sweet and charming as I think she is—so I don't know what I *can* do about it."

"Then," said Richard, his face suddenly scarlet, his lip white and straight and his eyes defiant; "the sooner you find out what you can do about it, the better! I tell you again you have *got* to see what you

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can do about it!" he went on passionately. "You've broken up my happiness all right, but of course I always knew that might happen, and I can look out for myself I reckon, but if she's made unhappy I won't stand it — I won't stand it, I tell you!"

"What will you do about it, Richard?" Emlyn questioned, not provokingly, but with an aloof, weary curiosity.

"I don't know — I don't know yet, and I don't want to have to find out, but if it becomes necessary I shall certainly find *something* to do."

Emlyn was silent. With down-dropped eyes he still played with the pens before him, picking them up and letting them fall again with absent gestures. Here was another phase of the weary tangle, and it seemed to him that his tired emotions could not take hold upon it. He liked Richard's frank youthfulness, and he understood his passionate young spirit. His brain told him, moreover, that he was right, and that there was probably very keen unhappiness in the predicament, both for poor little Dolly and for Richard himself, but his feelings could not grasp it. He was only conscious in his heart of his own sufferings and of Hester's, and of the overwhelming fact that they two were separated forever. That, for the time being, was his epitome of emotion.

He raised his eyes at length to the other's face. "Dick," he said, "I'm awfully sorry about it, I am truly. I suppose my coming suddenly down here like this and acting as I have done must seem very strange

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to you, but there's a reason for it that I can't tell you." He looked away. "A reason," he repeated in a low voice, "that hasn't worked out as I expected it to, and so I've made up my mind — I've decided to leave, to go back to Cincinnati, or away somewhere."

"To go away?" cried Richard in sudden surprise.

"Yes," said Emlyn, steadily. "I shall go now, I think, in a very few days."

"Oh," said the other, somewhat blankly.

"I think — I know it will be all right for you, but if there is anything else you can suggest for me to do, I should be very glad to have you tell me." He paused, meeting Richard's dubious gaze frankly.

"Why, no," said Richard, after a moment somewhat disconcerted, "I don't know of anything—but I say," he burst out impulsively, "I'm awfully sorry you're going away."

In spite of it all Emlyn smiled involuntarily. "But you surely don't want me to stay under the circumstances," he said.

The other turned to go, "No," he answered, "I suppose not. But then," he added, pausing at the door, "I don't know that your going away will do very much good."

Left to himself, Emlyn again took up his dreary pacing back and forth. He felt as though the grip of circumstances had got beyond his power. As though he were no longer master either of himself or of his fate. Pausing at one of the windows he looked gloomily down upon the hot little street, with its dogs

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asleep in the sunshine, the darky children playing here and there, and the hitching-rack with 'Squire Fairley's old dun horse attached thereto flicking with his limp tail at an occasional fly. He sought restlessly for some help or solution to his difficulty in the sweep and breadth of out-of-doors. As he stood thus looking up the main street a horseman came into sight over the brow of the hill where the road dips abruptly down into Willoughby. The horse was round and grey and leisurely, and his rider permitted him to take his way slowly along the street. They paused for a space by the pump, the horse taking a long and satisfying drink from the trough there, the while his rider sat loosely and comfortably in his saddle. Afterwards they came on up the street, to pause a little later and make some inquiries of Walker Hughes seated in front of his hardware store. Hughes waved his hand toward the building where Emlyn had his office, and the horse and his rider moved on deliberately in that direction.

Emlyn watched the two with an absorbed interest, because any outlook just then was better than the inlook at his own thoughts. At the door of the building the man dismounted stiffly, as though his years pressed upon him. He hitched his horse at the rack, lingering over the process, in evident consideration as to whether 'Squire Fairley's dun was a kicker or not; then turning to the building he pushed his hat back from his head, and with a little surprise Emlyn saw that it was old Uncle Billy Chester. Was he coming to see him, he wondered? He turned away from

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the window and sat down at his desk expectantly. Outside he could hear Uncle Billy coming heavily up the steps. Listening thus to the other's approach, he was unaware that what he heard was the tramp of Fate made audible. For indeed Fate is a capricious lady and would as lief clump along in the heavy shoes of an Uncle Billy as in a Cinderella's fairy slippers.

A knock fell at length upon the door, and with a sudden apprehension of excitement Emlyn sprang to open it. Uncle Billy entered, casting a fiercely genial eye around the office, and then upon his host.

"Howdy," he said. "Howdy."

"Why, how are you, Mr. Chester," Emlyn returned, giving him a cordial hand-shake. "We don't often see you in town," he went on loudly, setting a chair for the old man.

Uncle Billy sat down heavily and drew a deep breath as he stretched his legs in front of him.

"No," he said, "that's a fact, you don't. I don't reckon you ever *did* see me over in here afore," he added with a somewhat aggressive note of inquiry.

"Well, no, I don't believe I ever did," Emlyn admitted in a loud voice.

"Hold on—hold on!" Uncle Billy cried. He fumbled in his pockets with an eager hand, and in a moment drew out an ear trumpet. This he shook triumphantly in the other's face.

"There," he cried excitedly, "look at that now!"

"Oh," said Emlyn, "is that the trumpet I had sent to you?"

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"That's the feller," Uncle Billy returned emphatically.

"Well, I hope you find it helps you," Emlyn said.

Uncle Billy shut one eye. "It jest nacherly works clean out er sight," he said slowly, a pause of emphasis between each word.

"Well, now, that's splendid!" the other returned cordially. "I'm so glad it's a success."

"You bet," said Uncle Billy, "it's just the grandest thing that ever happened!" He crossed his legs slowly in a meditative manner. "No," he said, returning to the first question in hand, "I reckon you *ain't* never seed me over in Willoughby afore. They tells me you hain' been here above a year, an' it's all er three years — an' I wouldn't wonder if wan't more'n that — since I was here."

"Well, well," said Emlyn, with the air of being properly impressed, as Uncle Billy paused for comment.

In spite of his own inward tragedies, Emlyn had always the ability which amounted almost to an instinct of throwing himself quickly into another's attitude of mind.

"Yes, sir," Uncle Billy resumed, "it's all er three years. But when I got that there trumpet — " he held it off and squinted at it with satisfaction — "I ses to myself, I ses, bedogged if I don't go over to town an' tell the feller what sent it that she sure is a Jim Susser, an' that's what I done," he wound up with satisfaction.

"Well, I am very glad indeed that you find it helps you."

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"Yes, sir," the old man said with the reiteration of age, "yes, sir — I jest lowed to myself I'd go right over to Willoughby, an' here I am. Elizy, now, she didn't want me to come, an' she run round bleatin' like a sheep, an' sayin' as how she knowed it would kill me sure. But I come on jest the same." Uncle Billy paused, and then added in confidence as man to man, "I never was much of er hand to pay 'tention to the women folks." He sat back in his chair and chuckled, and Emlyn guessed that it had been quite an adventure for the old man, and that moreover his defiance of Elizy's authority had added decided spice to the occasion. He smiled in sympathy, and said, "Well, well," appreciatively again. "I hope all your folks are well," he went on.

"Yes, well 's common — anyhow no complaints ain't come through my trumpet."

"How's that smart little grandson of yours?" Emlyn asked, suddenly remembering the small person who had perched upon the old man's knee.

Uncle Billy slapped his leg and chuckled. "Well, now," he cried, "if he ain't the *beatenist* of any youngster that ever I laid my eyes on! *Smart?* Swis-s-s-h!" He made a whistling noise as though an engine blew off a puff of appreciation. "Whoo-ee! Don't talk!" he concluded, shaking his head and evidently lost in admiration of his offspring. "An' *bad* — well, gentlemen, I jest tell you, that youngster's mammy has to hustle to keep up with *him!*" He paused again, chuckling all over, as his thoughts evidently went back

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to some particularly brilliant and wicked escapade on the part of the gentleman of the calico skirts.

Suddenly, however, he straightened up and shot a direct look at Emlyn. "Aire you still offerin' the same figgers on that ther little strip er land er mine layin' at the mouth er Reeve's Holler?" he demanded unexpectedly.

Emlyn's heart gave a bound of excitement, but he managed to keep an outward show of calm.

"Yes," he said steadily, "the same figures."

"All right then, it's a deal," said Uncle Billy.

"*What!*" cried the other, shaken out of his self-possession.

Uncle Billy slapped his leg and roared.

"I thought maybe that'd kinder make you set up some," he said with satisfaction.

"Do you really mean it?" said Emlyn.

"Yes, sir, that's what I do," Uncle Billy returned. "You done me a good turn, an' I'd sorter like to do you one. An' more'n that," he added, "the price kinder tickles me — the land ain't really wurth a fifth er that." He paused, looking at Emlyn a moment, then, "Oh pshaw!" he burst out, "I ain't goin' to lie about it, what's the use? It ain't the trumpet, an' it ain't the price; I could er got that afore. But it's jest nacherly the truth — it's what you said about spite an' all er that. I studied over that right smart after you left, an' I've kep' on er studying erbout it. It sorter churned itself round and round in my mind like it was cream, an' now I reckon ther butter's done come — anyhow,



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I've come to the *conclusion* that you was erbout right. I'd commenced to study some on me bein' old, an' its lookin' kinder onery fer er old man like me to keep er hangin' onter a gredge right up ter ther very last breath. But somehow things yer say to yerself ain't the same as things other folks ses ter yer. An' it was reelly what yer nearly bust yerself ter say ter me through that ther little tube what done the business. I've had my money's wurth er spite outer that little stretch er no-count land — an' I tell yer," he added with triumph, "I jest nacherly made Eustace Calvert sweat every time he thought er me. Yes, sir, I had my money's wurth er spite out er old Eustace all right, an' young Eustace an' James too — an' *they* deserved it — every one er 'em deserved it, fer a more stuck-up, high-headed race er people I never seed, an' ef they was erlivin' ter-day Uncle Billy'd still be a-settin' on ther cork er their bottle all right. But they're all dead, so if yer're satisfied, it's a deal with me, an' you kin go ahead an' make out the papers. I reckon you looked up the title an' the calls afore you put in yer bid."

"Yes," said Emlyn, "they're all right."

"Er *course* they're all right — don't you reckon I know *that*?" Uncle Billy returned with sudden irritation. "You go ahead an' draw up yer writin's now," he added, stretching himself back comfortably in his chair. "An draw 'em up quick," he went on, "fer they tells me ther's anuther young Calvert feller runnin' round loose somewheres, an' ef I *was* to come acrost him I might change my mind ergin."

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The blood was pounding wildly through Emlyn's head, and he was mad with excitement. He settled himself at his desk, and as he drew the legal fool's-cap toward him, and dipping his pen wrote the opening words — "This deed made this twenty-sixth day of June —" the lines all blurred suddenly together and danced before his eyes. It was not the mere writing of a deed that would mean a fortune for the Calvert family, it was more — much, much more — and Page Emlyn knew it. Nevertheless he wrote steadily on, and in half an hour the deed was finished and acknowledged by Richard Breeze as Notary Public. The latter's eyes, by the way, stared out of his head with surprise and excitement. And so it was all over. And just a lucky chance, a mere trick of fate, had freed the Calverts' wonderful tract of timber, and had also freed Page Emlyn.

Uncle Billy took his departure at last. How he went and what he said Emlyn scarcely knew. He was only conscious of the great fact that now the Calverts would be rich, and therefore there was no longer anything to stand between him and the acknowledgment of his crime.

For a long time he stared blankly across his office, facing this sudden truth. Then with a gesture of dismissal he drew his papers toward him, and again he wrote steadily, feverishly on. But at last at the tail of the day his writing was finished, and pushing the papers from him he laid his pen down and buried his head in his arms upon the desk before him, and in spite

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of all his supposed desire for confession and the truth, he found, now that fate all at once held out the possibility of it to him, that his whole being shrank away in terror. And why, why should he do it? Why should he not slip quietly out of the valley, and away from all the life that had known him here? Hester was lost to him forever and forever no matter what he did. He had been able to do something for the Calverts in reparation; through him they would be rich people in a little while now, and that was something. Little enough — little enough, his remorse cried out sharply. But still it was something. And now why should he not take that fatally easy way back to his old life again, and live out among his friends what was left to him of his shattered career? What good, after all, would his confession do? Indeed, could he not do much more for his fellow men as a free man than as an imprisoned murderer?

With his head still in his hands, now that the way opened before him — the way which he had supposed he so keenly desired — he sought frantically, eagerly, for an excuse to evade the awful truth. But as his mind wandered along the pathway which opened so alluringly before him he was all at once confronted by the remembrance of Hester's words, "Your own best self will tell you what you should do, and I *know* that you will do it, Page." He paused over the thought in shocked surprise. Was he listening for what his best self had to say? Moreover, with this thought came the remembrance of what Richard had told him of

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Dolly. If Dorothy Calvert were really in love with him, it was a monstrous and terrible emotion, an emotion which his confession must surely kill. He drew a deep breath. That was the good which his confession might do, it might give Richard Breeze back his chance for happiness. And anyway — his thoughts probed still deeper now — whether it accomplished this or not, it would be the truth, and in the light of Hester's love the truth was what he must stand for.

For a moment longer he paused, his head still buried in his hands; then rising quickly, with decisive gestures he gathered his papers together, and went determinately and resolutely across the hallway to Richard's office. It was dusk now and both the offices and the hallway between lay in gloom. Richard had been out to his supper, but had returned to his office again, lured thereto by curiosity over the deal with Uncle Billy. He was too proud to go over and make inquiries of Emlyn, but he looked up excitedly now at the other's entrance.

"I say," he cried, "you put through a big job this day!"

Emlyn paused by his desk. "I came in to see you about that," he said. "I shan't be able to finish the thing up myself, so I brought in the papers for you. Here," he said very quietly, standing there in the dusk, "here is the deed — it's all right, calls and everything. This is the right-of-way I've made out through the land. And this is a letter to my old company tell-

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ing them of the Calverts' tract and recommending you to them. I know it's just the kind of timber they are looking for, and I don't think you'll have any difficulty in getting the price from them."

"But — but Great Heavens, man!" Richard broke in, "why on earth don't you do the trick yourself?"

"I told you I was going away —"

"But you can manage it all right before you go," Richard protested.

"No," said Emlyn, "it's not possible for me to attend to it."

"But Great Scots'!" cried Richard, "of course you know that you're just chucking away a great fat commission!"

"I can't do it, Dick," Emlyn said steadily. "You'll understand why pretty soon. I want you to put the thing through for the Calverts. And —" he paused, standing there in the dusk and feeling very far away, "it'll be all right about that other thing that you spoke of. At least I think it will — I hope it will. I am going to try to do what I can to make it right. I shouldn't like to think I'd interfered with your happiness." He stood a moment longer, and Richard regarded him in astonished silence.

"Good-by, Dick," he said at length, and turned away toward the door.

"Good-night," Richard cried, recovering his voice. "See you in the morning," he added cheerfully.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PRESSURE OF TRUTH

DOROTHY and Mrs. Calvert wondered why Mr. Emlyn did not come home to supper that night, but as Eugene had taken himself off to the Rymals', they had no one to send out to make inquiries about him. Therefore, after waiting a little while, they had some supper put aside and the table cleared.

Emlyn was working feverishly at his office. There were certain last things to see to, papers to put in order, and letters to write. There was one, a letter to Hester, which took a long time. Yet long as it took to write it, there was very little, after all, to say. At last everything was put in order and finished, and the smallest details attended to. There remained now only his final night as a free man, and then in the morning he would go to the sheriff and make his confession, and thereafter he would have no further responsibility for himself. In that thought there was a certain weary relief and strength.

He put his papers all together at last and drew down the roller top of his desk, and with the action he shut himself away forever from the false life he had essayed to live in Calvert's Valley. The pressure of truth was

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upon him, and soon, very soon now, he would make his grim sacrifice upon her altar. There was terror in the thought, of course, but there was also waking within him, now that his resolution was taken, a great free feeling of something strong and irresistible — something which was taking hold upon him and sweeping him on to an inevitable climax.

He crossed over to one of the open windows, to stand there for the last time looking forth upon the soft June darkness. The night was lighted by a little half-grown moon, and by the lights in the different stores and houses here and there in the village. The tree-toads called occasionally through the velvet stillness, and every now and then a dog barked somewhere in the distance.

Leaning there, Emlyn absorbed all the suggestions of the little town that the night permitted. Just a little far-away town in West Virginia, and yet here he had lived out the eight vital months of his life. Here he had tasted remorse, and here love; and here his whole being had been developed and educated. And terrible as it all was, he was conscious of a curious close tie binding him to the little place; the strange intimate kinship that a tortured prisoner might feel toward the rack upon which he had been broken.

It was almost nine o'clock now, and Emlyn asked himself how he should spend these last few hours. His one sharp desire was to see Hester once more. But as that could not be, it seemed to him that next to that he longed in some way to come in close touch with the

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village and its people. He felt, now that the end was almost here, that he had scarcely known what the real life of the place was, so occupied had he been with his own peculiar existence. Suddenly, as he leaned there trying to decide what he should do, he heard a burst of singing in the distance. It came from the little Methodist church down the street, where for the last week or so a protracted meeting had been in progress. The music broke the stillness softly and alluringly, and it occurred to Emlyn that a large number of the people of Willoughby would be in attendance at the meeting. There, for the time being, the life of the little place would centre, and with the thought he turned quickly away from the window, blew out his lamp, and shutting his office door went down the stairs, out into the street, and so across to the church. The church, a small enough little brick affair lighted by three large swinging lamps, and bare and uncompromising to desolation, was filled with the people of the village, those from the surrounding farms, and even a sprinkling of mountain people as well. They were still singing as Emlyn arrived, and the words of the hymn met him with a burst of sound.

“ At the cross, at the cross,  
Where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my soul rolled away!  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day! ”

He hesitated a moment by the door, and then went resolutely forward to a seat near the middle of the



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church. He had a lonely craving to be in the very heart of the assembly; to be surrounded, buried, overwhelmed by a mass of people; to feel the nearness of humanity; to hear them, see them, be engulfed among them. That night he had a passion for his fellow beings, for that night he had a right to them, he was one of them, they would associate with him. To-morrow? Well to-morrow the world would know him for an outcast. This was the last time that he could be a man among his fellow men — “A reed with the reeds in the river.”

The singing came to an end presently, and in the little pause of waiting which followed, Emlyn had a space in which to take note of the scene before him. Up near the front was the mourners' bench, with its four or five seekers kneeling before it: a middle-aged man, a young boy, and two or three girls in their teens. They knelt with their backs to the congregation, and every now and then their bowed shoulders shook with emotion and a sob was audible. In the pause after the hymn, different ones in the congregation — prominent members of the church — stole forward to whisper to the seekers, encouraging and exhorting them.

Looking at that broken line of penitents, Emlyn experienced a sharp throb of pity. It was another page in the immemorial book of the seekers after God. There is another book like it — the book of those who sought and found; and there are other books of the same nature. God's great library, written with the tears of human souls — tears of grief and passion and rejoicing.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

Not one of the people with whom he had been most intimate was present, but as his eye travelled over the congregation, Emlyn caught sight of one familiar face after another. The faces of people with whom he had not been closely connected, perhaps, yet with whom he had been thrown constantly in the daily intercourse of business, and of whom some little remembered word or incident rose up now to bring him a touch of humanity and kinship with each.

Another hymn was started presently. This time it was the old familiar refrain, "There's a land that is fairer than day."

Emlyn did not sing, but gradually as he sat and listened to the well-known words rolling forth in waves and undulations of sound, the walls of the little church seemed to fade away and he drifted back into the past of his childhood. It was the hymn to which his old darky nurse had been wont to sing him to sleep on summer nights down on his father's plantation in Virginia. "In the sw-e-e-t by and by —" Emlyn could see his nurse's head in its bandanna handkerchief outlined against the dim starlight of the window, while he, a small sleepy boy, lay in his cool little bed and listened to her mellow tones, to the faint sweet noises of the summer night, and sniffed the dew-drenched fragrance of mignonette and clove pinks which came up from his mother's garden beneath his bedroom window. There was another sound too — he had always listened eagerly for it — the low tones of his mother's voice as she sat upon the porch below con-

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versing with the chance callers. Every now and again the murmur of her words would break into a deliciously sweet, irresistible ripple of laughter. And all the melody of sound and fragrance, together with the feel of his cool pillow, and the happy weariness of his little body, used to weave themselves into an exquisite tranquillity, an ocean of peace, that bore him at length drowsily away and away upon its waves into that remote land of dreams, and mystery, and sleep.

The hymn ended at last, and with its cessation the past picked up her elusive skirts and fled away, and the live present returned upon Emlyn.

The preacher — he was brother Abram Saunders — rose in his place.

“My Christian brothers and sisters,” he said, “I wish you all to unite now in giving in your religious experiences for the benefit of these dear sinners who are seeking the faith here to-night. Surely some brother or some sister present has a word that may bring the truth and light into their weary and sin-tossed souls.”

He sat down, wiping his brow with an ample pocket handkerchief and crossing his legs. There followed upon his words a little pause of waiting and expectancy. Then over in one corner of the building a man rose slowly, limply, to his full height. He was a lean sandy man with wistful eyes, and stooping sad shoulders.

“My Christian friends,” he said, “I want to testify to-night that I’m on the Lord’s side, an’ I want you all to pray for me.”

Afterwards he sat down and was lost in the general

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the Lord's side and I want you all to pray for me," he said.

He was scarcely aware that he spoke out loud. He was not addressing the small congregation in this more or less secluded corner of the world, he was speaking to that long line of imperious fighters, declaring his partisanship, taking his stand in one of the great battling columns, and crying to those upon his own side to strengthen him. Crying to those in the small congregation now present — to those in the great world outside, in the universe — to those of forgotten times, of the present, and of the far-away future. And even as he said the words, he had a sense that his line paused for one brief moment in its conflict and made room for him. As though one fighting desperately might stay a moment, wipe his sword, dash the sweat from his brow, smile, and plunge back into the combat.

Emlyn rose quietly, steadily to his feet. All the waiting congregation turned toward him with a wave of rustling expectancy. He was scarcely aware of it. He was held in the immensity of a great stillness, in the sense that he was breaking the bonds of time and place, and stretching out into something that was limitless and for always. He stepped out into the aisle a little way, and stood calmly before them all, one hand resting upon the back of the pew. Then he spoke.

"I killed James Calvert," he said simply and clearly. "I was drunk so that I did not know what I was doing. I pushed him over the Raven Rocks — I am a murderer." He paused a moment, looking over the heads



Emlyn rose quietly, steadily to his feet



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of all his hearers, looking away into the unseen. He was unconscious that a white leap of horror and consternation swept from face to face of those before him. "I am on the Lord's side," he said, "and I want you all to pray for me."

It had become almost a refrain with him now, and he struck into the familiar closing words somewhat as a poem comes up through the choppy irregularities of thought to burst forth in the breadth, the sweep, and gladness of the open full spaces of its great idea, the inspired climax, the music of it all.

He stood for a moment longer after the words were uttered, and he was absolutely unaware of the horror before him. Then he turned and walked out of the church. He scarcely knew where he went, and he was conscious only of an immense still serenity, and also of a great exhaustion. He passed quickly along the main street through the stillness of the night, very aloof from everything, and at length, arrived at the Calverts' house, he went up-stairs to his own room and flung himself down upon his bed, and in a little while he fell into a deep sleep of utter peace and weariness.

## CHAPTER XXV

### AFTERWARDS

BUT if Emlyn walked quietly home and sinking down upon his bed fell asleep in weary peace, there was anything but peace and quiet in the congregation before whom he had made his confession. They let him go, it is true, but it was because for the moment there was no one among them to take the initiative and they were paralyzed to inaction. For a minute, face turned to face, they stared at one another in horror and question and consternation, then gradually all eyes centred upon Brother Saunder's, sharp with the interrogation of how the situation was to be met.

Brother Saunders stood before them irresolutely. He was not used to having any one get up in his experience meetings and confess himself a murderer, and confronted by such a revelation he was at a loss how to bear himself. He was not a very forceful man, and the stress of the unexpected always dismayed him. He stood now staring down at his people, with his mouth slightly agape, and bewilderment in his small pale eyes. Then a sudden inspiration came to him and he drew an unconscious breath in the relief of it.



## AFTERWARDS

"Let us all unite in singing hymn number eleven," he said, catching gladly at the respite thus afforded.

The strained astonishment of the waiting people was broken by his words, and in the mechanical fluttering of hymn books, and finding of places, most of those present recovered their own individuality and volition, and it was only a small number of voices that finally followed their pastor into the hymn, and a still smaller number who sang it faithfully through to the end; for as the singing began, one after another, member after member, rose, looked about irresolutely, and then stole out of the church, and when the last strains died away, Brother Saunders found that the necessity for decision had been taken from him, and in the face of his dissolving congregation the benediction was all that could be required of him.

Outside the startled people for the most part stood about in groups and discussed the event in ejaculations of horror. But some there were who, loving the excitement and distinction of bad news, ran breathlessly from house to house scattering the awful tidings. Some again, but these were only a few, went silently and sadly to their own homes, overcome and shocked by the awfulness of what they had heard. But one man — a small and meagre individual, whose habitual, furtive expression was changed now to one of malicious triumph — had slipped out quickly and gladly the very first of all, and arousing the sheriff had already sworn out a warrant for the arrest of Page Emlyn, while most of the congregation still stood in

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astounded groups discussing what had best be done. And thus it happened that before long Emlyn was brought back to consciousness out of the black depths of his fatigue, by the touch of a heavy hand upon his shoulder, and by a word spoken in his ear. He opened his eyes confusedly. The room was full of people, of light, and of tense excitement. Directly above him towered the sheriff.

"You are under arrest for the murder of James Calvert," he said.

For a dazed moment Emlyn stared up at him. Indeed he almost laughed. He had been dreaming of his old home in Virginia, and with the vividness of it still in his mind, he seemed a child once more with his mother's sweet mirth floating somewhere close by, and it was ludicrous surely that a man should stand there talking to him of arrest and murder. In a flash, however, his mind cleared and he remembered.

"All right," he said quietly, and stood up. "Who swore out the warrant?" he asked, as he slipped into his coat and found his hat. He asked it with a sort of idle curiosity, as though he spoke of a thing which did not concern himself.

"Josiah Beaks," said the sheriff. "He was at the prayer-meeting and heard you confess."

"Josiah Beaks!" said Emlyn, and again he almost laughed, nor was he conscious of any keen resentment against Beaks. "I never thought of him," he said, "but of course he would do it."

Suddenly there was a rush of feet upon the stairs

## AFTERWARDS

without, and Richard Breeze burst into the room. He was breathless with consternation.

"What's all this? What's all this wild story, Emlyn?" he cried. "Are you drunk or crazy?"

Emlyn looked at him a moment in silence. He was ready now and was preparing to leave the room with the sheriff, while the two or three men of the latter's posse stood about in awkward attitudes of excitement.

"Neither," he said at last quietly. "I'm just telling the truth, Dick. I was drunk when I — when it happened. I did not know what I was doing?"

"I don't believe it — I *won't* believe it! It's not possible — it *can't* be true!" Richard burst out passionately.

"It is true all the same," Emlyn returned.

"Come on," said the sheriff, stolidly.

There was the sound of a woman sobbing hysterically and bitterly somewhere in the house.

"You'd better stay here and see what you can do for them. Eugene is away, I think," Emlyn said in a low voice, turning to Richard, and the latter fell back in a bewildered silence.

The sheriff and his prisoner came out upon the porch steps, and Emlyn was aware of a silent waiting crowd in the dark. Down the steps they marched, and down the path, and out into the main street, and came at last to their destination, and the black crowd kept even pace with them all the way. And to Emlyn the most awful part of the whole thing was the stolid utter silence of every one. It was as though the

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realization of his terrible deed had made impossible the natural friendly gift of speech.

Outside of Willoughby, stumbling and panting through the dark, wringing her hands hard together, and sobbing in short sharp breaths, a woman ran and ran along the uneven road. It was Maria Crocroft, and she was weeping and flying through the night back to the silence and seclusion of her own little cabin by the Raven Rocks.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ANNE CALVERT, WIFE

THE next day opened with a blue serenity of fair weather, which seemed a laughing indifference to the excitement and horror that clutched Willoughby and its surrounding valley. It was as though the elements smiled one to another and said, "To-day man is distracted, he is aghast. But is that any reason why we should abate one jot of our carnival of rejoicing?" For in all probability the elements and nature have a high contempt for man as being the only ingredient in the world's make-up whose hold upon happiness and trust has slipped a little.

Wherever little knots of people stood in the shade of the trees along the street, one knew that they talked of Page Emlyn. Where two men came together as their horses drank from the watering trough, they told each other about it in dropped voices. Where a woman scudded across the way to a neighbour's, one knew that she went in haste to discuss the dreadful news. Where a clerk waited upon a customer, the package was wrapped up and the string jerked from its holder and tied about the bundle to the accompaniment of some little added scrap of information bearing upon

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the all-engrossing subject. So sudden was it, so astonishing, so absolutely unexpected, that the life of the whole little town stood still for one astounded instant, then with a gasp it caught its breath and burst forth in shocked speculation.

"Well, to think of *him*! An' such a nice seemin' young man as he was, too! Why, not above two weeks ago my little girl gave him a handful of our black-heart cherries!"

"Yes, and once he picked up our lap robe that had fallen out of the buggy, and returned it. Now that I know what he is, I think we were real lucky ever to get it back again."

"Well, well! But I always *did* say there was something mighty strange about a young fellow giving up a good place in the city and coming down to the country like this — you know I always did say that, right from the very first."

"And just to *think* of him staying on right there with the Calverts! And then think of him speaking up like that in the midst of meeting, and then turning around and walking out like it was just *nothing* — and they say he was in his room asleep when they came to arrest him!"

"*Asleep?*"

"Yes, sir-ee, as sound asleep as you please!"

"Well, I reckon the ways of Providence always *will* be past finding out!"

"*Providence!* Well, *you* can call this Providence if you like, but *I* just call it the plain old devil!"

## ANNE CALVERT, WIFE

Out in the cool peace of her semi-darkened parlour, where the perfume of bowls of early sweet peas and mignonette greeted one's entrance, the news was brought to Mrs. Crozier by the palpitating Eliza Phillibrown, and all the morning her steady knitting-needles kept pace with Miss Phillibrown's shuddering ejaculations and speculations, and with her own pitying wonder and dismay.

Sitting in his unutterably dirty little cell, and staring out through the iron bars of his one window, up the murky panes of which a few querulous flies crawled endlessly, advancing a little only to slip back with buzzing futile complaints, Page Emlyn could imagine all the excitement and horror that his confession had wrought in the little town. His room was close and hot and unspeakable, and who had been its last occupant, and when it had last been cleaned, were things over which it were best not to speculate. Yet Emlyn was almost unconscious of his squalid surroundings. He was a happier man than he had been for many a long day. He was himself once more, he no longer played an awful and secret part. To his own astonishment he was forever losing sight of the horror of it all, in a curious tranquillity. It was as though the goddess of Truth had unexpectedly rewarded him for the sacrifice made upon her altar.

His windows looked out upon a forlorn back street of Willoughby, which indeed was more truly a muddy road than a street, and which presently, shaking off its sordid environments of pig-stys and battered tin cans,

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runs away into the glad relief of the country, to be redeemed after a time by little clean meandering brooks and the fresh verdure of open fields.

People constantly stopped by the window to stare in upon him, and a little group of small boys had hung about the jail all the morning possessed by a passionate interest.

There was nothing for Emlyn to do save sit with his head upon his hands looking out of the window, or pace up and down the narrow room.

Very early in the morning Richard Breeze and the Judge had come to see him, and Emlyn had gone through the whole story and answered all their questions with a determined steadiness.

"But why in Heaven's name — how *could* you go on living here, and staying right in the very house with the Calverts too!" Richard had burst out.

That was the fact which had struck the deepest note of surprise and horror in the minds of everyone.

"I wanted to confess," Emlyn began, speaking quietly — he had been over it all so many times now that the story seemed to tell itself with no volition on his part, and though he was mentally conscious of the sharp strangeness of sitting before these two men and acknowledging himself a murderer, emotionally it somehow failed to come home to him — "I meant to confess, just as soon as I was sure I had done it, but Eugene Calvert came to see me about getting some work to help him through with his medical course, and without thinking what it would mean I made him let



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me lend him the money for it, and it was not until after he had consented that I realized what I had done. Of course I couldn't confess after that without throwing him back in his career. But at the time I never thought what it would mean." He raised his eyes almost involuntarily to his hearers' faces, and there was a plea for credence in his look of which he was scarcely conscious. Richard shifted uneasily and looked out of the window without speaking. But the Judge answered quickly, "Of course you didn't. I believe you — I believe you, my boy."

An eager flush mounted to Emlyn's forehead, yet he did not find any words in which to express his gratitude.

"And then," he went on presently, "it came to me suddenly that as I couldn't confess on account of Eugene, I might come here to Willoughby and try to take up — to take up *his* life, you know, and live it as he would have done as far as I could." He paused, staring blankly past them. "And that's what I've been trying to do," he went on slowly; "but," he added, "I've made an awful mess of it — and it was awful — a terrible situation! I don't suppose you ever can cheat the truth. But at the time I thought I was doing the only thing I could as atonement. But it's been awful — impossible — almost from the very first, and I've wanted to confess and get out of it time and again, but you see I couldn't until yesterday." He paused, a weary sombre expression in his eyes.

"Why, what happened then?" the Judge asked.

"Why, yesterday, I put through a deal with old Uncle

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Billy Chester for that strip of land of his that has tied up the Calverts' big tract of timber for so long. They won't have any trouble in disposing of it now, and then, of course, they will have plenty of money of their own for Eugene's studies. So I was free — but I didn't mean to confess like that before every one, I meant just to go to the sheriff quietly in the morning. But somehow —" he hesitated, "somehow I was carried out of myself."

"Are you a drinking man?" the Judge asked presently.

"No," said Emlyn, "my father drank, and that always gave me a loathing for the stuff."

"And you took it this time to save Haymer's feelings," the Judge said. "And also you say you did not know how strong it was?"

Emlyn nodded. "Yes," he said, "but those are no real excuses."

"And you remember nothing until you found yourself standing upon the edge of the cliff with that old woman beside you?" the other continued.

"Nothing connected, just the series of pictures I told you of."

"Then I don't believe you did it!" Richard broke in, in vehement protest. "I don't believe a man *could* do a thing like that and not know it — do you, Judge?" he appealed.

The Judge did not reply to Richard.

"It is a very terrible situation," he said gravely, "very, very terrible," he repeated. He stood for a

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moment looking at Emlyn kindly and sadly. Then he put out his hand and laid it on the younger man's shoulder. "Poor boy," he said. But perhaps his words were prompted more by an inner consciousness which said instead, "Poor girl, my poor little Hester!"

Emlyn turned quickly away, for the Judge's kindness cut him to the quick with gratitude.

"And remember," the Judge went on, "I will be glad to do all I can for you," and with the words he turned and went out before Emlyn could thank him.

After his departure there was a little pause of silence between Emlyn and Richard Breeze.

"You see now, Dick, why it was?" said Emlyn after a little, a question in his voice. "It will be all right for you now, won't it?" he persisted.

Richard's face was moody and depressed. "Oh yes," he returned, "I reckon it's all right as far as that goes."

He had a sudden remembered vision of Dolly as she had appeared the night before.

"O Dick, Dick!" she had cried frantically, "how awful it is! How terrible! Oh, how *terrible*! Oh, how *could* anybody be so wicked!" and she had broken down in wild hysterical sobs.

"Oh yes," Richard repeated, still gloomily, "I guess it's all right about that."

Emlyn regarded him in a troubled silence. Here, he thought wearily, was another of his attempted atonements which had miscarried. "Well, what's the matter then?" he asked at length.

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Richard turned upon him vehemently.

"*Matter?*" he cried, "why, great Heavens! isn't it matter enough that a man you've liked awfully, and thought was the finest fellow you ever saw, should turn out to be — to be —" he broke off.

And Emlyn too was silent.

"I don't care," he rushed on again presently. "I don't care — I know it's an awful thing — but just the same I like you better than any fellow I ever knew!"

With the words he whirled round and dashed the door open, and presently afterwards Emlyn heard him shouting furiously to the jailer to unlock the outer door for him.

The morning wore slowly away and the afternoon began its hot progress. Emlyn had had his dinner — such as it was — and had taken refuge in silence against the innumerable questions fired at him by Jim McGraw, his jailer, a man who combined an inordinate curiosity with a certain rough kindness; and now he was once more left to himself, to stare out of his window, or to pace up and down his narrow cell.

Presently, however, his door was pushed open once more.

"Here's a lady wants to see you," McGraw announced.

In astonishment at the words, Emlyn sprang to his feet and turned quickly around. From the gloom of the passage without, Anne Calvert came quietly into the dingy light of his cell.

## ANNE CALVERT, WIFE

Emlyn stood and stared at her in silence and stupefaction.

Jim McGraw lingered in the doorway, tense with curiosity, a rather weakly apologetic smile upon his face.

Mrs. Calvert turned to him. "Thank you, Mr. McGraw," she said in her softly modulated voice, "I won't trouble you any more for the present."

She was only a thin and faded woman of middle age, in somewhat shabby apparel, yet suddenly one remembered that she had been a Calvert of Princess Anne County; and with her steady composed eyes upon him, Jim McGraw backed awkwardly and apologetically out, pulling the door shut behind him.

When they were alone she turned her steady eyes back to Emlyn's face.

He was overwhelmed with the awfulness of her presence.

"Oh, how could you come! How could they *let* you come?" he burst out.

He had a poignant desire to shield her from the situation, to protect her from the horror of his own nearness.

She made a little quiet reserved gesture, as though she brushed his words aside.

"I want you to tell me all about it," she said.

"Oh, no, no — not *you!*" he cried.

"You must," she returned compellingly.

Still Emlyn was silent.

"You must tell me," she repeated. "He was my son." Her voice was even and devoid of expression.

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"It is too awful for you," he whispered, his words hardly audible.

She regarded him with a curious surprise.

"Do you suppose," she said, "that a mother can ever avoid any of the awfulness of life?"

She looked past him out of the window, her eyes vacant with the expression of one who looks inward, and even in the intensity of the moment she seemed evolving the philosophy of life that her tragedy had taught her.

"We are all bound up in one another's lives," she said slowly. "I do not think it is possible for anyone to go through the world alone — but a wife — or a *mother* —" she broke off. "You see," she said presently, "you must tell me."

And understanding at length, Emlyn told her the whole terrible story, the while she sat upon the edge of his wretched pallet, rigid and quiet as a small tense statue. His voice was steady and almost monotonous, but his heart was consumed with an unspeakable pity for her, and loathing for himself.

At the end she spoke almost eagerly.

"Then it was not — not because you hated him for anything?" she said.

"No — no!" he returned, "it was because I was drunk — too drunk to know what I did."

She was silent a little longer. Then she spoke again.

"Thank you for telling me," she said in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper. "I thought — I was afraid my son had committed suicide. I knew he

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had reason to be very unhappy. But I should have known," she added, her tones suddenly stronger, "I should have known a Calvert could not have done such a thing."

She rose, and going over stood near Emlyn for a moment. "I am sorry for you," she said in a voice that was curiously dead. "I am sorry for you, and —" she spoke slowly, a faint pause between each word, "and I forgive you."

Emlyn put up his hands in a quick sharp gesture of protest, but he did not speak.

"Yes," she went on, "I forgive you — I have a reason for forgiving you. My husband drank — I suppose you knew it — everybody knew it — it was his inheritance. He was killed by a fall from his horse when he was drunk." She spoke with a little pause between each sentence. "I loved him . . . people were sorry for me while he lived . . . but — I loved him . . . and I feel now — perhaps it is strange, perhaps I am wrong — but I feel the more I can forgive another for the same sin — the more, perhaps, God will forgive him." She was silent a moment. "I sometimes think," she said at length, "that we women of the men who drink have to give almost our own souls for their salvation."

Then she turned quietly away, and opening the door passed out of the cell.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A TRIBUTE TO LOVE

HESTER had sat in the cool back sitting-room at her own home sewing with Lottie and Emmy Breeze all the morning and through the early afternoon as well. The girls had pulled the blinds almost shut to exclude the light and heat at all the windows save the one by which they were at work, and to which they had dragged up their machine. The light streamed in through this window and fell upon all three of them and upon their rainbow confusion of materials as well. The rest of the room was in semi-darkness, or lighted only by occasional bright spots where the sun danced upon some object — the mirror over the mantelpiece, or a glass vase of field daisies on the side table. It was a simple picture full of colour, and set in the difficult light and shadow a Velasquez might have loved.

The girls had been indoors all day, and as the Rymals' place was a little removed from Willoughby, they had not, as yet, heard the news which held the village in such shocked surprise. Richard Breeze had come out early in the morning to tell Judge Rymal of it, but the Judge had so far kept it to himself. He had meant to tell Hester after breakfast, but then he put it



## A TRIBUTE TO LOVE

off weakly until she should have had dinner, for he had a sharp intuition — a fear — that what touched Page Emlyn touched her as well, and so he sought instinctively, as people will, to place the supposed fortification of food between his daughter and the poignant news.

Hester sat at the machine by the window, and stitched on a delicate green muslin which was sheer and ruffled until it looked like seafoam. Emmy and Lottie were busy over some soft pink material. It was to be a frock for Lottie when it was finished, but Emmy flung herself into the making of it with a sweet enthusiasm and as much interest as though it were for herself.

It was rather a silent little group. Lottie, the usually vivacious, was playing with tender whimsical thoughts of herself and Eugene — thoughts which of course one could not tell to anyone, but which were fascinating and engrossing in the extreme. Emmy was quiet because Lottie was, for she always took colour from her sister. While it seemed to Hester, that since that tragic scene out in the starlit road, she had lived and moved and had her being in the presence of a great catastrophe. As though, do what she might, work, play, laugh, talk frantically, always the overpowering fact of what Page Emlyn had told her stared at her with blank eyes. Yet in spite of the awfulness of it, she was aware that she had come suddenly upon a wonderful new strength and power within herself. With her little plummet of personality she was sounding for the first time the miraculous depths of love.

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Into this quiet scene Cousin Lizzie came suddenly hurrying, her plump little figure vibrant with agitation.

"Oh, girls!" she cried, "Oh! such *terrible* news!"

Hester's feet slipped from the pedal of the machine with a sharp sound, and the needle ran on for a little distance through the green stuff at random. She turned and stared at her cousin, but she did not speak, she did not question — it seemed to her that she knew already what the news was.

"What, Cousin Lizzie! *Oh, what!*" cried Emmy and Lottie in a nervous breath together.

"Why, Aunt Ginnie's just told me," Cousin Lizzie rushed on. "Page Emlyn —" she was so excited that she caught her breath at the name with a little choke and had to stop.

"Please go on, Cousin Lizzie," said Hester.

"Page Emlyn says he killed James Calvert — says he pushed him over the Raven Rocks when he was drunk. He stood right up in protracted meeting last night, and told all about it before everybody. And Josiah Beaks swore out a warrant for him, and now they've got him in jail waiting for the trial next week." Her voice once clear, Cousin Lizzie plunged through her news in one horrified breath.

In the gloom at her back the Judge's figure appeared. He was looking anxiously across at his daughter. Hester sat very rigid and still staring straight before her, her hands gripping the machine through the green foam of her work.

## A TRIBUTE TO LOVE

"Oh, how awful — how perfectly *awful* for Eugene!" cried Lottie. "Oh, you know he lent him the money for his medical course — and Eugene admired him so, and *now* — Oh, how *awful* —" she broke off.

"How awful for all the Calverts!" cried Emmy, "and for Richard too, he — he thought Mr. Emlyn was so splendid"; and she choked and stopped, her eyes filling with tears. Any sudden revelation of wickedness was apt to make her cry.

Hester rose slowly to her feet and turned upon them all. She was suddenly very tall and overpowering, a vivid human being standing in the flare of light from the window, with the green material of her work billowing all about her.

"Yes," she said, "yes, it is terrible for Eugene and Richard — Oh, of course, very terrible for them, but perhaps also it is a little terrible for Page Emlyn as well."

The others looked at her and at one another a moment in astonishment.

"Why, Hester!" cried Cousin Lizzie aghast.

Hester stood in her place a little longer, vivid and alive, yet aloof from all of them. Then without speaking she turned and walked out of the room, through the hall and up-stairs to her own chamber, closing the door behind her. For a moment she stood still in the little room where was only herself, the accumulation of her own thoughts, her soul, and her God. Then with a little shiver she buried her face deep in her hands, as though she sought to shrink away from the awfulness

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

of it. Yet after a moment she raised her face and spoke softly in the intimate stillness of the little room.

"O God, I thank Thee — Oh, I *do* thank Thee!" she whispered.

A little longer she stood still, her face very high and exalted; then she turned quickly to her wardrobe, and taking out her hat pinned it on mechanically before the mirror, and opening her door she went resolutely down the stairs. Lottie and Emmy and Cousin Lizzie were all three still in the sitting-room — Hester could hear the hurrying murmur of their low excited voices — but her father was standing in the hall.

"Where are you going, my child?" he said, looking up at her as she came down the stairs. There was a large tenderness and pity about him.

"You know where I am going, father," Hester returned quietly.

He took her hand in his. "Hester, my poor child," he said, "do you realize what he has done?"

"We love each other, father," she answered steadily.

The high pure look was on her face still, and there was about her something as inexorable as fate.

"But — dearest — you cannot marry a man who has done a thing like that," the Judge said.

"Oh, no, we cannot marry of course," Hester, answered. "He told me about it night before last—we said good-by then. We — we had forfeited that by our sin." She spoke without emotion, enunciating her words slowly.

## A TRIBUTE TO LOVE

Going out on to the porch she started unswervingly down the path to the gate, with the Judge following her.

"Why do you say 'our sin'?" he asked almost jealously. "You had no part in it."

"I don't know," she answered absently. "I say it without thinking, but I think if you love anyone very much, anything that is theirs must be yours too, their sins, their sufferings, their happiness — everything."

Her father kept pace beside her and made no further objection to her going. He had loved once with a great passion, and knowing what the splendour of love was, he kept silence now in the presence of Hester's.

Hester went steadily upon her way, her head very erect and proud. There are great inexorable forces in the world which seem occasionally to centre in a human being, to make that person for the time a sort of live wire — a concentration of irresistible force and determination — a wave of resolution sweeping to its consummation. Hester had for the moment become one of these enkindled forces, and nothing save a stronger physical power than her own could have checked her progress. She came into the outskirts of Willoughby, and walked through its streets proudly, almost fiercely, paying her tribute to love in the face of all her home town. She was very well aware of how narrow and sordid gossip ran like wildfire through the little place, and of the consternation that would be created by her

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

visit to Page Emlyn in jail — she who was supposed to have been engaged to James Calvert. She knew it all and she was glad — glad that some of the opprobrium that was his should fall upon herself as well. Therefore she walked imperiously down the shady main street, past the hardware store, past the bank and post-office, and at the corner where the Sheehan House stands, she turned down the side street to the jail, knowing that the women in their cool summer dresses who sat upon their front porches and watched the world go by while they fanned themselves and rocked, noted her passing, and saw the turn she took with a sudden craning of necks and a gasp of excitement.

It was at this corner, turning into the main street, that Judge Rymal and Hester met Mrs. Calvert. The Judge took off his hat, and Hester looked at her, ready to speak also, but Mrs. Calvert passed them by without a look, without a word. Because she had a reason for it, she could find strength in herself to forgive the man whom she supposed had killed her son, but she could not forgive the woman who had scorned that son's love.

At the door of the jail Hester turned to her father. "I want to go in alone, please," she said, and so, after the preliminaries of entrance, the door of the cell closed behind Hester, and she and Emlyn were alone together.

He had started to his feet at her entrance. "*Hester!*" he cried with a deep breath.

## A TRIBUTE TO LOVE

She moved toward him, but he drew back, waving her off.

"No — no!" he cried passionately, desperately. "No! O Hester, remember — remember what I am!" He turned sharply away from her.

But suddenly looking at him, Hester smiled, a wonderful, all-encompassing, magic smile, and coming softly over to him she took his hands down from his face, and held them steadily in her own.

"My poor boy — my brave, *brave* boy," she whispered.

"O Hester — *don't!*" he cried, trying to drag his hands free.

But Hester still held them, and still she smiled at him that pathetic, courageous smile. "Dearest," she said, "it has got to be so. I had to come, I had to let you know that I am with you in everything, and that I think you are brave — splendid and fine and brave! And — and *this* too —" and with the words she stood upon tip-toe, and kissed him upon the mouth. Then having paid her tribute to love, she dropped his hands and went away, and once more Emlyn was alone.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### MARIA CROCROFT, MOTHER

It was the third of July. A week had passed since Emlyn, under the pressure of truth, had made his confession in the midst of Brother Saunders' protracted meeting, and in the presence of a large portion of the people of Willoughby. The July court was in session now, and at last the proceedings had dragged slowly around to the charge against Page Emlyn for the murder of James Calvert.

Emlyn had remained in jail for the intervening days. The physical discomforts of the place seeming to him, after all, preferable to the acceptance of bail and the going forth to thrust the fact of his presence upon the people of Willoughby, and to meet their furtive and shocked gaze. It had been a difficult week to live through, hot and long and terrible. Yet his conscience had taken a grim heroic satisfaction in the thought that he was receiving retribution for what he had done. And there had been as well that constant sense of relief and strength in the thought that he had restored himself once more to the magic circle of truth.

Judge Rymal had come often to see him, as had also Richard Breeze. The Judge, at Emlyn's request,



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had even undertaken his defence, though it was several years since he had taken any active part in his profession.

Josiah Beaks had appeared before the grand jury and testified to Emlyn's confession, and in accordance with his statements, George Haymer and Maria Crocroft had been summoned as the chief witnesses against him.

It was a hot day, sticky and close and oppressive, and in the crowded court room the air was heavy to suffocation. The bright intensity of the weather found a tragic answer in the waiting expectancy of the crowd. People had assembled from Willoughby and the outlying farms of the valley, and even from as far away as the Shadow Mountains and the Black Hills as well, for the splash of excitement caused by Emlyn's confession had flung its widening ripples into remote corners. It was an assemblage of men. Every individual present felt the clutch of the heat, and most of them mopped their brows from time to time exhaustively. In Calvert's Valley the women do not go to court. Instead they sit at home and wait, with that almost fatalistic patience which goes so often to the make-up of the country-bred woman. Therefore Hester sat all alone now in her own chamber at home, with the door fast shut, and waited.

Emlyn, in his place at the bar, looked over the court room with a detached sense of curiosity. He knew that something very terrible in which he was the chief actor was in progress, yet somehow the sharp reality

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of it failed to come home to him. Perhaps his emotions had been stretched by the long months of strain beyond their power to respond. He knew that he was being tried for murder, yet he was conscious of being aloofly interested in the little things passing before him, rather than in the great fact itself. In the expression, for instance, of moist heat on every one's face; in recognizing different people whom he knew in the crowd; in noting how the prosecuting attorney rustled over his papers nervously; in the look of gravity on Richard Breeze's face — in fact in all the little trivialities of the occasion. Yet there were moments, too, when looking through the court-room windows at the tops of the trees tossing in the hot breeze and sunshine of out-of-doors, he realized that life and freedom were still passionately sweet to him, and that perhaps he was losing them both.

Josiah Beaks was the first to be called to the stand, and he gave his testimony with a righteous unction.

"An' I jest said to myself," he concluded, "that a man that would stand up and confess to a thing like that oughtn't to be going around in a place like this where there's a lot of women and children, and so I went straight over to the sheriff an' swore out a warrant for him right at once. A man like that oughtn't to be left to go loose," he wound up virtuously, his eyes travelling over the court room in search of some responding expression of approbation on the faces of his hearers. But his audience remained cold.

"Looks like Joe thinks the fellers ought to take up

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a collection fer him, an' hand it over with a *presenta-*tion speech of thanks fer havin' saved all er Willoughby from bein' murdered," a man in the back row whispered to his neighbour.

"B'lieve he'd like to have a medal thrown in too," the neighbour assented. "Joe Beaks bein' against him," he went on, "is one reason I can't help thinkin' maybe —"

"Sh-h-h," his friend cut him off. "Let's hear what George'll say."

Beaks having been dismissed, George Haymer had taken his place upon the stand. His face was moist with the heat, and white with apprehension, and his manner was agitated.

"Tell what you know of the case before the Court," he was ordered.

In obedience Haymer opened his mouth in one or two unsuccessful attempts to speak, then he coughed and cleared his throat violently.

"Well, now, reelly," he managed to get out at length, "I don't rightly know nothin'. Yer see," he added, taking the court into his confidence, "I was drunk — jest nacherly dead drunk."

"Well, tell as much as you *do* know," the prosecuting attorney insisted.

"Well, there ain't nothin' much I recollect, 'cept that me an' Mr. Emlyn, we got drunk, an' after that I didn't know nothin' till long 'bout night I come to, an' m'wife said how James Calvert had fell over the Raven Rocks an' got kilt."

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"Was the deceased drunk also?"

"No, he wouldn't tech er drop er my lick, though it was good whiskey." There was the old note of grievance in his voice.

"Did you hear the defendant make any threats against the deceased?"

"I don't recollect none."

"Did you complain to the defendant that the deceased had ill-treated you?"

"I don't recollect."

"When you and the defendant started away from your house, were you going in search of James Calvert?"

"I don't recollect," Haymer returned monotonously.

The prosecuting attorney looked at him, baffled and contemptuous.

"You don't seem to recollect anything at all, do you?" he said irritably.

"Well, now," said Haymer, slowly and apologetically, "er course I don't know how it is with *you*, but with *me* when I gits drunk I never do recollect nothin'."

A ripple of laughter swept across the court room, making the Judge call sternly for order.

"You can stand aside," said the prosecuting attorney angrily, and Haymer, passing his arm over his face to wipe the perspiration from his eyes, stood aside gladly.

"Call the next witness," the prosecution ordered; and standing up in his place and clearing his voice, the sheriff cried, "Maria Croccroft, Maria Croccroft!"

Maria Croccroft rose from her seat at the back of the

## MARIA CROCROFT, MOTHER

room, where she had been awaiting her summons, and walked resolutely up to the witness stand, and turning around faced the waiting court room with all its expectant audience.

She presented her usual tensely quiet and faded personality. Her black skirt of some limp woollen material hung loosely upon her. Her calico bodice was of an indefinite grey colour. She had taken off her black-slatted sunbonnet and held it rolled up in her hands in a nervous grip. To all appearances she seemed a forlorn and meagre enough little figure, yet for those who had the eyes to see there was about her a touch of dignity, that terrible distinctive dignity which marks all those of the world upon whom life has placed its stamp of catastrophe. They may be despairing, they may be wildly rebellious, or they may be heroically brave, no matter, there is upon them all that something which differentiates them from the rest of happy mankind. They are drinking very deep and often very bitterly from the cup of existence, but in the draught they are set apart and educated beyond their fellows.

Something of this thought came to Emlyn as he looked at the woman upon the stand before him. And suddenly he had as well a vivid remembered picture of her standing up in the midst of the meeting, and saying she was on the Lord's side.

"Tell the Court what you know in connection with the death of James Calvert," the prosecuting attorney said after she had been sworn in.

Maria Croccroft drew a deep breath and her rigid

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little figure was shaken by a slight tremour. She clutched her sunbonnet tight in both hands, and looked over the heads of the people, seeming almost unaware of their presence. The expression of her eyes was far away, and perhaps she was looking into the past. Yet when she spoke her voice was quiet enough.

"God never give me but one child ter live ter grow up, an' him an idiot," she said. There was no bitterness in her tone; it was merely a quiet statement of the situation.

The prosecuting attorney stirred in his chair and interrupted her sharply.

"Keep to a statement of the facts in hand," he said.

Maria Crocroft brought her quiet eyes for a moment back to his face, waiting until he should have finished. She regarded him with the expression of one infinitely older — infinitely more experienced. There was nothing arrogant in her gaze, it was merely a calm recognition of the difference between them, the tolerant look one bestows upon a child. She was aware that he was younger in the grip of life than herself. When he finished speaking she turned her eyes again to the window and began once more. "The Lord never give me but one child to live to grow up, an' him an idiot," she repeated steadily.

At the repetition of the words the prosecuting attorney made another angry gesture, yet he did not attempt again to interrupt her. Judge Rymal looked at her with a sudden sharp interest, and there was a stir of eager surprise through all the room.

## MARIA CROCROFT, MOTHER

"My house," she went on after a moment, "sets jest er little piece back from the Raven Rocks, an' — an' — Sonny — my afflicted boy — he was allers er terrible hand to play round them clifts. He had er gret way," she paused an instant, steadying her voice; "he had er gret way," she went on firmly, "er rollin' rocks an' logs an' things over the clifts every time he got er chanst — he liked to hear 'em splash in the crick below."

Again she paused. Her hands were gripped very tight on her sunbonnet now, and her face was white. Then she drew a sharp brave breath.

"It was Sonny killed James Calvert," she said, and put her hands up over her face. "My poor, poor little boy run up behind him an' pushed him down — right down over the clifts!" Her words came slowly between difficult sharp breaths.

A great rustling wave of astonishment went over the court room as every man turned in his seat to look at his neighbour and then turned back again to Page Emlyn. Emlyn sat very still in his place, his face pale, and his incredulous eyes fixed upon the old woman.

Maria Croccroft struggled on again with her story, and all the men present leaned forward, straining to catch her every word.

"I was up on the mountain er little piece back er my house" — her words were broken every now and then by a tense low sob; "an' lookin' down — I seen Mr. Calvert standin' on the edge of the rocks — an' then all ter onct I seed Sonny take out an' run from ther

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house. An' — an' it come ter me like er flash what he was meanin' ter do. An' I hollered ter him, an' run after him—an' run—an' run—" She paused. "But I was too late," she said at last.

"An' then — an' then," she stumbled on presently, "an' then I seen Mr. Emlyn comin' up the path ter the clifts, an' I knowed by his walk he was drunk — but I was skeered — I was skeered he seed what Sonny done an' would recollect erbout it when he come ter hisself. An' like er flash it come ter me ter make him think he done it hisself . . . An' — an' so I did," she faltered; "'cause I was feared — I was feared they'd take my child 'way from me an' put him in the 'sylum, an' he was all I had — jest all in the world I had." She paused, her thin little body trembling all over. "So I made Mr. Emlyn b'lieve he done it," she went on, "an' when he come to me afterwards I still told him he done it. But when Sonny died I come into Willoughby an' I tried — I *tried* ter tell him the truth — but I couldn't," she said pitifully. "I jest *couldn't* tell on my poor little child. An' I ought ter er told when I heerd Mr. Emlyn stand up in meeting that erway, but seem like I couldn't do it then neither. But er course now I got ter tell. An'," she added vaguely, "an' anyhow, Sonny's dead — he's dead, so it can't make no difference to him now." Again she buried her face in her hands and in the crumpled bundle of her black sunbonnet, and all the court room waited in silence.

"I — I dunno," she said at last, "I dunno what the



## MARIA CROCROFT, MOTHER

Lord'll do ter Sonny — I wished — Oh, I *wished* ther Bible said He was a mother, stead er allers sayin' He was er father," she added in a pitiful low voice.

She stood before them all, a little grey shaken figure of tragedy, and the men who had been watching her tensely turned their eyes awkwardly away, looking out of the windows, at Emlyn, at one another, down at their own hands — anywhere but at her.

She straightened up at last and spoke to the Judge.

"That's all — that's all, I reckon," she said quietly, and turning away she stepped down from the witness stand.

Page Emlyn rose slowly, tensely to his feet. The court room and all the people's faces swam giddily away from him. Somewhere back in the crowd a man cried, "Well, I'll be doggoned!" in utter blank astonishment. In another part of the room some one laughed suddenly, nervously. Richard Breeze jumped to his feet.

"I *said* it wasn't true!" he cried, "I said all *along* he couldn't —"

But the presiding Judge pounded upon his desk and rose in his place.

"The case," he said, "is dismissed."

And with the words, the world, and life, and love flung out wide arms to Page Emlyn, and he leaped into a freedom more magnificent, more joyous, more splendid, than any he had ever known.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### NOT THE END

"AND so he didn't do it after all!" It was Dolly Calvert speaking, and she drew a deep breath, the childish notes in her voice broken by an intense astonishment. She sat with Richard Breeze in the Calverts' sitting-room, and he had just told her the result of Emlyn's trial.

"No," said Richard, "he didn't do it at all, Dolly." He looked at the pretty bit of womanhood opposite him wistfully.

"But he *thought* he had done it," Dolly persisted.

"Yes, old Maria Croccroft made him think so."

"Because he was too drunk to know any better," she said inexorably. And somehow the very youthfulness of her voice added to its inflexibility.

"Yes, he was drunk," Richard admitted; "but that was an accident. I know he's not a drinking man." Richard was being very loyal to his friend.

"I don't see how a man can *ever* get drunk by accident," said Dolly. She had always been spared the knowledge of the Calverts' curse. "And thinking he had done it," she went on, "he still came here to our very house, and lived with us."

## NOT THE END

"Yes, but he did it, don't you see, just because he felt so horribly, and because he thought by being here he could make a sort of atonement," Richard returned, faithful to Emlyn.

"Oh, how *could* he think that — how could he think anybody could take — could take James' place! And he thinking all the time he had killed him!" cried Dolly, sharply. She drew a quivering breath, and rising abruptly went over to the window, and stood there looking out and crumpling the lace of the curtains in her agitated little fingers.

"I — I can *never* forgive him!" she said, and her voice broke. "And," she went on in a moment, "*Hester* went to see him in jail — when everybody still thought he was a murderer. And I —" she sobbed suddenly, "I loved Hester so, and thought she was so splendid and brave, and all the time — all the time —" She broke down and hid her face on her arm.

"Poor little child," Richard said tenderly, standing close beside her.

"I — I can never forgive either of them — *never!*" Dolly sobbed.

And with a wisdom beyond his years Richard did not attempt their justification or defence.

She took her hands down at length from her face, and turned to him. Hers was one of those soft little faces that tears do not mar much.

"O Dick," she said, "*you* are just the same, aren't you? You haven't got any terrible secret that you are hiding from me?"

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

It was characteristic of Dolly's youth that she should think herself the chief sufferer from Emlyn's and Hester's secret.

"No, Dolly, no, dearest, I haven't any secret from you," Richard returned. "I'm just the same as ever, except — except," he added, "that I love you better every day."

To an older person he might have looked very young, but he would have looked also very sincere and very much in earnest. To Dolly he seemed all at once infinitely strong, and wise — a veritable rock of defence.

Instinctively she shrank a little away from him against the window frame; nevertheless she said softly, "Then, Dick, you — you can have me now."

Richard looked at her for one brief astonished second. Then he swept her into his arms and covered her little flower face with kisses.

He knew that he had caught her in the rebound of her love for Page Emlyn; he knew that she was scarcely more than a child, with a child's narrowness of perception; he knew it all, and yet he was not afraid. All at once he was older than he had ever been, older with the wisdom, the tolerance, the education of love. Love before had created wonderful imagined things in the woman whom he adored. Now, of a sudden, it created wonderful real things within himself.

"I like the people best that I have known always," Dolly said at length, a little disillusioned note in her voice, yet nevertheless she spoke softly and sweetly.

## NOT THE END

And Richard kissed her again — little fleeting kisses all over her face.

. . . . .  
There is a little grass-grown path at the back of Judge Rymal's house, which runs through a steep hay-field, over a rail fence, and so away into the woods. Young couples like to stroll along it; to stop and talk and talk, leaning against the fence there, and picking idly at the splintering decay of its rails.

Lottie Breeze and Eugene Calvert leaned there on the afternoon of the day of Emlyn's trial. There had been silence for some time between them. They had discussed all the painful subject through and through, and now Lottie was aware, with her little understanding heart and her quick perception, that Eugene sought to get away from the thought of it. So she waited for his words to take whatsoever direction they might please.

"Well," he said at last, and gave his shoulders a shake. "Well," he repeated, but still he did not continue. "Oh," he burst out presently, "Oh, Lottie, it has been awful — the whole thing! But of course I understand how he could have done it. It must have been a terrible thing for him too. It seems unspeakable to think of his living on in our house like that, when all the time he thought—he thought—" Eugene did not finish his sentence. "But he did it all," he went on presently, "thinking it was the best thing he could do, and so nobody can blame him — at least I don't," he added.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"O Gene!" Lottie cried earnestly, "I *do* think you are splendid!"

It seemed to her very noble of Eugene to feel that way toward Emlyn. She knew that the latter had not killed James Calvert, yet because he had believed he had done so, and had said he had, she could not help a little unconscious sense that he really must have done it.

Again there was a silence between them. Then with a sudden burst of gladness Eugene turned and caught both her little brown hands in his.

"O Lottie, Lottie!" he cried, "did you know that our big tract of timber is free at last, and as soon as it is sold you and I will be able to marry right away!"

"Why, *Eugene!*" cried Lottie.

"Yes, and that's Emlyn's doing. He managed somehow to get around that old Chester mule, and now the rights-of-way to the tract are all clear, and Dick has nearly completed a deal for it already. And, sweet-heart," he added firmly, "I shall marry you in the autumn."

"In the *autumn!*" gasped Lottie.

"Yes," Eugene nodded. "And take you back to Baltimore with me."

"To *Baltimore!*"

"Yes, and as soon as I finish there we'll go abroad and study."

"*Abroad!*"

Lottie gave a little skip of sheer delight. Then she flung her arms about Eugene's neck.

## NOT THE END

"O Eugene!" she cried, "Oh! *Aren't* we exciting people!"

Page Emlyn and Judge Rymal walked up the garden path to the latter's home side by side. As they entered the house the Judge said, "I think you will find her in the parlour."

With a smile he stepped aside, and left Emlyn to enter alone the cool semi-darkness of the room, where love triumphant and a new life awaited him.

Out at Mrs. Crozier's Miss Eliza Phillibrown recounted eagerly the incidents of the trial as she had picked them up from a walk into the village. Mrs. Crozier listened to her as she bound off the last stitches of a baby's afghan.

"Well," she said with satisfaction, shaking out the afghan as Miss Eliza came breathlessly to the end of her narrative, "that's finished at last."

"What is finished?" asked Miss Eliza.

"Why, the Flaxcomb baby's blanket, of course," Mrs. Crozier returned. "I'm afraid he's almost outgrown it while I've been at work on it."

"Oh," said Miss Eliza, a trifle disappointedly, "I thought you meant Mr. Emlyn's story."

"I certainly did not," the other replied. "How can anybody's story ever come to an end?"

"Only by death, I suppose," said Miss Eliza, sighing and dropping her eyes. She always paid death the tribute of a sigh and dropped eyelids.

## IN CALVERT'S VALLEY

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Crozier, with more force than she usually directed toward the latter. "No amount of death puts an end to a story. Why, this was really James Calvert's story more than anybody else's, and he was dead, poor fellow, before it was fairly started. Stories *can't* come to an end. Once they are started, no power on earth can stop them, and I hope no power in Heaven will."

"Hem-m-m," said Miss Eliza, with that little softly drawn-out sigh that she always emitted at any mention, no matter how remote, of the Deity.

"A train of consequences once set going can never be stopped," Mrs. Crozier continued. "They go on down the ages, gathering up other consequences and entangling more lives, like an enormous snowball rolling away into eternity. And it does not matter how dead the first characters are, the story they started goes on just the same. And besides the story they leave behind them, think what a much more interesting and vital story people must take with them into the next world — dragging their tales behind them, in fact. But when you come to that thought," Mrs. Crozier added, "one's imagination really has to pause and take breath."

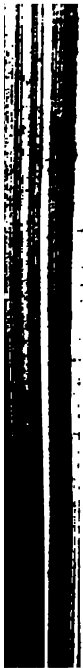
"Hem-m-m-m, yes," Miss Eliza assented, a trifle doubtfully. She was not quite sure that she understood what her friend meant. Mrs. Crozier, on the other hand, was perfectly sure that she did not.

But I trust that the reader agrees with Mrs. Crozier's reflections, for they are really quite true. There is much



## NOT THE END

and much more to Page Emlyn and Hester Rymal's story, and always will be. This is not the end — dear me, no! It is only the place at which the author has chosen to stop. And to be quite frank, if the reader desires any more, he must, in classical phrase, sing it himself. A procedure, by the way, which is earnestly recommended. For stories which one sings one's self are always infinitely more interesting and exciting than stories which are merely sung to one. Just as a game in which one takes a hand is far more delightful than the game one looks on at. Just as — to go a step further — the living of life is always a million times better than sitting down and reading about it, or looking at a picture of it, or listening to a symphony on it. For the one is art and the other is reality.







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